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Derek Charles Glover, M.Phil , B.Sc.(Econ.).

The Reality and Implications of Community Perceptions of  
School Effectiveness: A Case Study of Selected Schools.

Submitted for examination for the degree of Ph.D.

School of Education

April, 1992

Authors number: M7045771  
Date of submission: 1<sup>st</sup> July 1989  
Date of award: 24<sup>th</sup> August 1992

2012

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## ABSTRACT

This research begins by analysing the effects of parental choice on the development of two neighbouring schools in one county between 1980 and 1990 and questions the validity of community judgement of schools.

The literature review traces the development of home and school links and community involvement, the measurement of school effectiveness and previous work on parental choice of school. A distinction is made between "choice" and "judgement" of schools. The community which might affect a school is defined as parents, leavers and the community at large.

An initial survey in one school identified those features which were considered important in judging the effectiveness of schools, and, backed by findings from a number of research sources, twelve criteria were selected as the basis for the main fieldwork. By means of a rapid response survey up to one hundred respondents in each of seven secondary schools, selected to give a range of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, were asked to identify which of the twelve criteria were seen as strengths in the school. Up to thirty interviews were also held in each school community. In each school the identified strengths were compared with evidence for the existence of those strengths in school performance.



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The literature review traces the development of home and school links and community involvement, the measurement of school effectiveness and previous work on parental choice of school. A distinction is made between "choice" and "judgement" of schools. The community which might affect a school is defined as parents, leavers and the community at large.

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Findings suggest that where a school has developed from former grammar school roots, or has a sixth form, judgements are made on outcomes but in other schools the process factors are seen to be more important. There appears to be a general match between community perception and reality.

Explanations are offered for the way in which this match has developed. Some evidence is given to illustrate the impact of judgement, and hence choice, on parental preference as it affects single school and area wide provision. Evaluation suggests that more objective evidence is needed before a definitive statement can be made on the reality of community perception.

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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisors, Prof. R. Glatter and Mr.C. Riches, for their prompting, support and patience; to the communities of the schools who have so willingly accepted my presence and probing, and to my family who, at the point at which they could have expected more of my attention, found me once again on the workaholic list.



## CHAPTER ONE

### BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY OF COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOLS

The aim of this research was to examine the way in which perceptions are formed by the various interest groups which constitute the community served by any school. It sought to consider the nature of the factors which affect judgements which are made on the quality of schooling and to see how these judgements may be affected by external influences as well as by the life of the individual school. Because of the impact which "judgement" has on "choice" made by parents in the selection of schools in an open enrolment system, investigations were also aimed at charting the effects of community opinion on school development and Local Education Authority (L.E.A.) provision. Despite difficulties of analysis, the investigation aimed to test perceptions which are held about case study schools against measurable and qualitative criteria which might indicate whether community evaluation of schools can be objectively sustained. If this is so there are

implications for the communications network between schools and the communities which they serve.

The origins of this research lie in a study of the impact of parental preference on school development in an unusual geographical, socio-economic and educational environment in West Oxfordshire over a twenty year period between 1970 and 1990. During this time the writer was head teacher of Burford school and deeply involved in attempts at the resolution of problems caused by varying perceptions of the reputation of two neighbouring schools.

Burford and Carterton Schools, Oxfordshire

The area served by the schools lies west of Witney and extends to the Gloucestershire boundary running from the R.Thames in the south to the Cotswold crest just south of Chipping Norton in the north - a collection of 34 villages and hamlets. An Elizabethan Grammar school had been established at Burford in 1571 and has continued to serve the area through a chequered history becoming a local authority school in 1924 and the first reorganised rural comprehensive school in 1954 as chronicled by

Simpson and Rylands (1971). Four miles from Burford the village of Carterton had grown steadily from the war years as a major R.A.F. transport base and by 1968 it was clear that there would have to be a massive extension on the Burford site or additional secondary provision at Carterton.

The decision was taken to maintain an 11 - 18 school at Burford but, in order to maximise the curriculum advantage of a potential of ten forms of entry to an upper school, the Carterton school would be a junior high school with four or five forms of entry feeding to Burford at age 14. In the period from 1969-76 this system was followed but problems arising from the difficulty of integration of pupils from two very different environments into the senior school at 14+ were such that the preferred long term solution was to increase capacity at Carterton so that it could become a true community school for the 11 - 16 age group. The raising of the school leaving age had created pressure on accommodation throughout the surrounding areas and further adjustment of catchment areas in 1976 increased the Burford area to include the villages west of Witney

to give a six or seven form entry school and the Carterton organisation was for a six form entry school serving the needs of a town then with a population of 8,000.

The problems which had prompted this solution arose from the very different catchment areas of the two schools. Burford was traditional in outlook; stable in population with successive generations attending the same school; rural, with no settlement then larger than 1,800, and increasingly middle class as improved road networks and industrial growth to the west of Oxford led to a dormitory society. By contrast Carterton was much more cosmopolitan in outlook; mobile, with 70% of the school population subject to three yearly postings; essentially "planned urban" with limited but increasing community facilities, and a real wish to be self-supporting as a centre of employment aided by the development of two trading estates and the provision of cheaper, first time buyer, housing. The view of all concerned in the planning of educational provision was that two community schools responding to their own different environments would best



suit the social and educational needs of the area.

There were, however, social groupings within the Carterton community largely based on established residential areas contrasting with R.A.F. accommodation, but also reflecting the difference between the cultures of the families of officers and the other ranks involved on the Station. These were significant as emphasis was put on the exercise of parental preference following the 1980 Education Act and the publication of guides to choice of school such as those by Anderson (1982), Itzin (1985) and latterly, Partington and Wragg (1989). This was the period of increased political awareness of educational issues building upon the "Black Papers" of Cox and Dyson (1969) which were critical of "progressive" educational practice. The public debate has been outlined by David (1987). There was no lack of interest from parents both at Burford and Carterton during this period. Consumerism as subsequently reviewed by Batten (1987) was evident at an early stage and the effect of this has been detailed by Glover (1983).

Burford had three advantages which parents were keen to exploit by securing admission for their children.

It had had a fifty six acre school farm with a national reputation for agricultural education. This was based on pedigree pig and dairy herds, the management of which had ensured credibility in the eyes of the farming fraternity. There was a Boarding House which had originally been provided for boys following the agricultural course but which had been extended to accommodate girls in 1978. The sixth form of 200 was drawn from a total of ten or eleven forms of intake from the two schools. To established families living within the Carterton catchment "the farm" was a means of securing admission to Burford; to an increasing number of service families boarding was a palliative for mobility, and many parents attempted to push for pupil admission on the strength of eventual sixth form education or the availability of the classics, diversified languages and separate sciences which this brought to the main school. Between 1976 and 1982 all parents expressing a preference based on agricultural or boarding availability were interviewed by the Head and an Area Education Officer and the contemporaneous notes show that there were often



other reasons associated with the tradition of the school, the continuing belief in the "grammar" school, and a desire to remove pupils from the Carterton environment for reasons which were often poorly expressed and which lacked rationality.

By contrast Carterton, despite new buildings and a newly appointed staff with high ideals and a true community mission, was seen as the poor alternative. Educational debate was turning against open plan, pupil centred, resource based learning and the William Tyndale and Tameside L.E.A. cases highlighted in the popular press exacerbated the situation for aspiring parents, a national phenomenon described by Hopkins (1978). The problems of day to day discipline occurred on the doorstep of the potential parents, the local grapevine constantly referred to the "grammar" school at Burford, and new arrivals at the R.A.F. base were often misdirected to Burford as a "traditional" school. Indeed, investigation revealed that some staff at three of the four primary schools in Carterton had suggested that parents look to Burford for more academic education and that some of the education wing advisers from the R.A.F.

had reinforced this message. School based research in 1987 showed that 80% of the applicants for Burford came from one primary school and one geographical area of Carterton corresponding to the officers married quarters. Common policies on uniform, similar in all respects except for ties and badges; pastoral care systems with house and year activities; joint activities in music, sport and careers education had all been fostered by the heads of the two secondary schools and the advisory service in an attempt to remove the possibility of undue competition. Curriculum philosophy had been agreed between the two schools to include a common approach to the hidden curriculum in matters such as assembly organisation and the annual pattern of institutional ritual, and every opportunity was taken for the idea of two "sister" schools to be developed. Even so, many parents from Carterton saw the distant school as superior despite problems of inaccessibility, overcrowding and environmental difficulty in poor weather periods.

Although the local education authority was clear in its interpretation of both the 1944 and 1980

Education Acts, the local approach was essentially pragmatic with successive area education officers attempting to meet parental needs and political pressure within the L.E.A. framework. It had been decided that sufficient places should be left at Burford to allow for admissions to a specialist agricultural course at age 13 and to permit boarding at any age if vacancies existed. From 1976 onwards, although the school was notionally six form entry, a further form was allowed to "grow" between year one and year four. Although vacancies were left at year one stage they were subsequently filled by applicants, many of whom were refused at the first application and then having agreed that their children should follow the agricultural course or take up a boarding vacancy, entered the school in year two or three. This led to some movement from Carterton but because of a joint policy agreed by both headteachers and aimed at suppressing such moves the problem was not great until 1981. The regulations and guidance for the 1980 Act contained arrangements for appeals and, where vacancies existed below the planned admission number which had been set at 180 rising to 210 for Burford, appeals committees

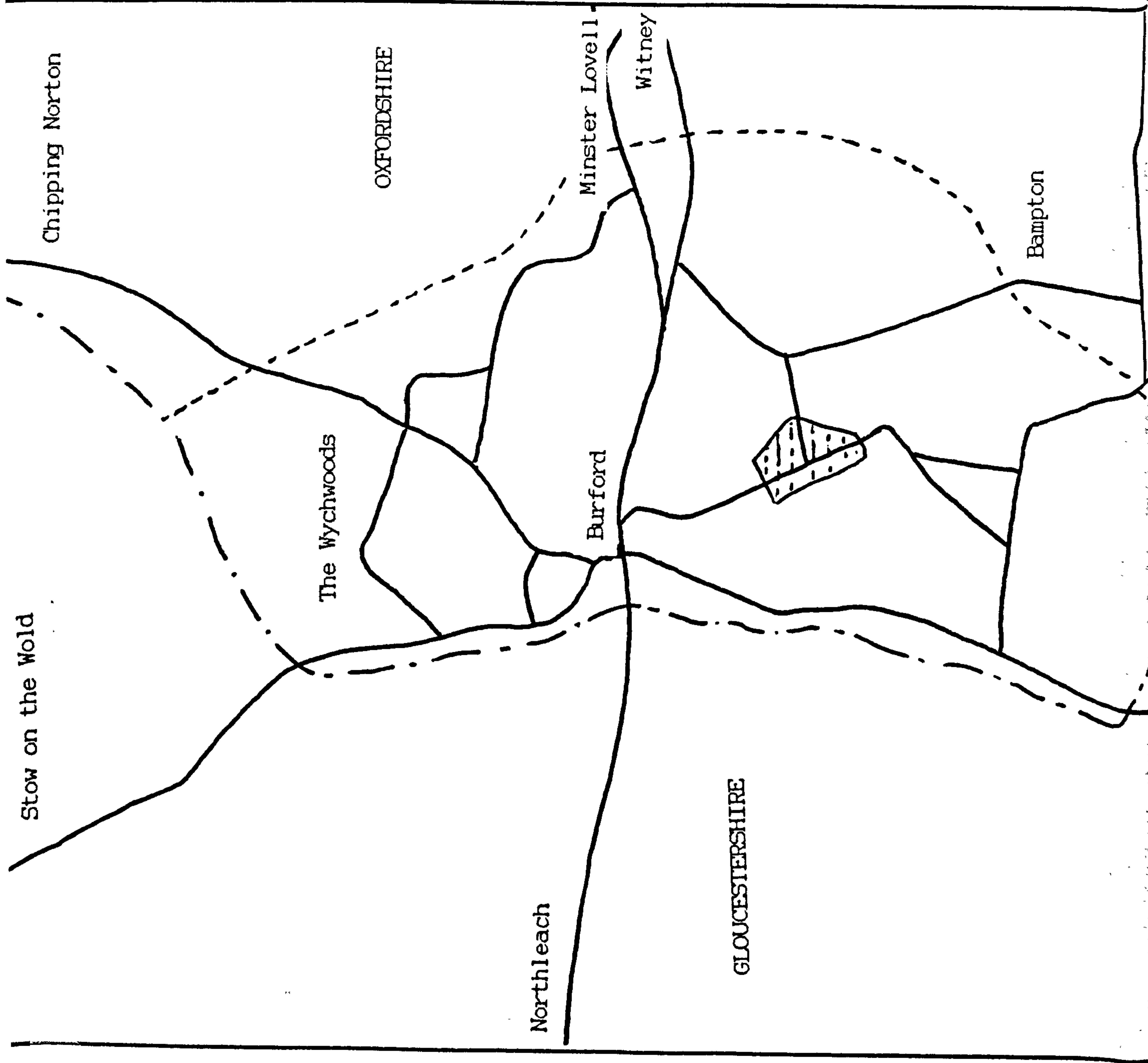
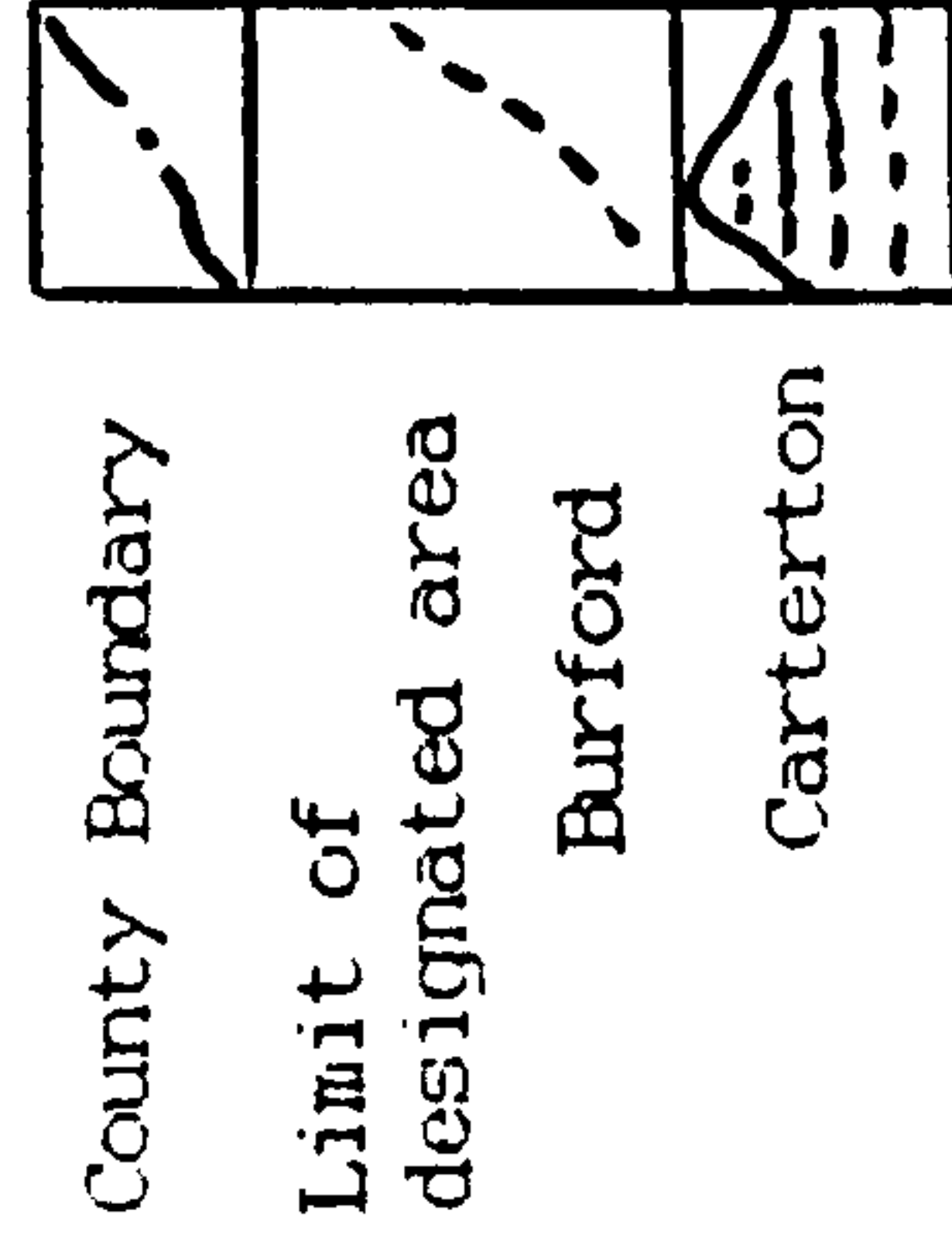


Fig.1 Designated Catchment  
Area of Burford School



Scale 1 inch to 4 miles



tended to fill spaces. This accorded with the experience of Stillman and Maychell (1986) in their investigation of four differing local education authorities and exemplifies the "administrative justice" approach outlined by Tweedie (1986) where panels have ascertained that the local education authority has acted within its administrative powers in refusing admission to a particular school but then proceed to make exceptions if the parental case so justifies. In 1979 there were five admissions from Carterton to Burford, in 1982 the number had grown to twenty three. Further, where places existed these had to be seen to be allocated against some demonstrably fair criteria originally based on sibling attendance and nearness to the school but extended in 1986 to include children with a parental link to Burford. This was intended to strengthen the case of farming families living at some distance from the school and to lessen the number of those coming from Carterton who, despite their nearness to Carterton School were also the nearest of the out-of-area applicants for Burford as shown on Fig.1.

With the onset of falling rolls after 1986 the impact of choice of Burford by the parents of Carterton pupils became serious. Despite public emphasis on the development of a pupil centred, caring community philosophy for Carterton there was evidence that the concepts of "exit, voice and loyalty" as defined by Hirschmann (1970) were informing developments. Whilst applied originally to the commercial world, the idea that a consumer feeling dissatisfied might "exit" to another market, express the dissatisfaction in an attempt to use "voice" to bring about change, or accept what was offered with "loyalty", has been seen to have significance for much human behaviour. Connell (1987) demonstrates the class linkage to educational support and aspiration and this was evident with the number of middle management applicants, for whatever stated reason, who were looking to Burford because of its examination results and the continuation of traditional expectations reflected in army cadets, a lively sporting programme and the maintenance of a strong sixth form. The vocal element affected Carterton policy by supporting a move for the establishment of a local sixth form and by exerting



pressure on the school for the delivery of comparable examination results. This consumerist group were, however, incapable of seeing how the loss of the more able element to Burford had weakened the opportunity for this to occur. The fervour of the loyal group was evident in 1987-8 when the local education authority proposed that the problems arising from loss of pupils to one school would be overcome if a new school on a split site incorporating both Burford and Carterton were to be established. Opposition, led by parent governors, was considerable. The case for separate schools rested on the maintenance of different relationships between school and community in a scattered rural and a concentrated urban area. Certainly by 1988 whilst there was little difference in actual curriculum philosophy or pastoral practice the manifestations of community education had become very different with a much higher degree of adult participation in daytime activities, and an extended use of the local community facilities for course development in Carterton. By contrast developments at Burford had been much more gradual, and although there was a strong

community involvement in the management and use of facilities, there had been only limited movement towards a community curriculum. There was some evidence that the "exit, voice and loyalty" concept was also at work at Burford. Parents of potential pupils visiting the school were seeking reassurance that ability setting would continue in the first year (Year 7). The decision to move to mixed ability groupings in 1987 was met by the withdrawal of some children to the independent sector. The "voice" group made its views felt on the decision through the Parents Advisory Committee, and many of the "loyal" group were only placated by an undertaking that there would be a review of the system after one year of operation.

A joint meeting of Governors was unanimous in its wish for the retention of two schools despite the resulting problems but the effect was to increase the "exit" from Carterton to 43 in 1989 with the "voice" and "loyalty" elements of the community co-operating in an attempt to improve the image of the school in a way remarkably similar to that suggested by Deal (1985) and Gray (1989). A marketing survey within the Carterton

catchment area conducted by a business consultant who was a parent governor at Carterton showed a lack of public awareness of the facilities, community life, and examination success of the School, and the continuing strength of local myth perpetuating some of the problems of pupil misbehaviour and local vandalism which had been evident in the junior high school a decade before. The response was a restatement of the community relationships with a major expansion of all-age activities including sport, music and craft and drama and the wide dissemination of a bright brochure explaining the aims and objectives of the school in a "user friendly" presentation. At the same time Burford agreed not to promote their school within the Carterton area, to maintain the somewhat staid house style on information material, and to avoid local press publicity. Technical and Vocational Education Extension occurred at this period and provided an opportunity for collaborative planning of drama, business studies and personal and social education activities; messages on collaboration were exploited, and attempts made to reduce any local

comparison of the two schools.

Carterton, with space for more pupils was locally unpopular and, in the eyes of some parents, was therefore a "bad" school whilst Burford, under pressure for pupil spaces, was seen to be a "good" school because it was popular. This reflects the assessment made by Bash and Coulby (1989). Despite the joint effort to support Carterton, parents continued to state their preference for Burford. "It was almost as if the public thought that we were trying too hard to support Carterton" was the comment made by the Burford Chair of Governors. In 1989 53 requests were made from the Carterton area and in September 1990 that school fell below three forms of entry because of the generous standard admission number for Burford based on the 1979 accommodation availability at a time of maximum pupil numbers.

Burford was increasingly aware of pressure from out of area pupils the proportion of whom had grown to 40% by 1989 with three effects. First, the expectation of many who had exercised their preference despite daily problems of travel over long distances was that they were assuring pupils a bright future whatever their ability



level and there is evidence that some were disenchanted with the school's failure to overcome such learning problems. Secondly, this led to an adversarial parent voice reflected in an average Annual Governors' Meeting attendance of 160 in the period 1987 -9 and a growing feeling that the out of area element was determining policy discussion for the local community as investigated in a random sample of thirty families interviewed by Woolley (1990). Finally, class differences were becoming more marked as shown in the School Association minutes of 1988 when vituperative exchanges highlighted tension between those who were prepared to covenant £100 annually for school funds "because we would otherwise have used private education" and those, highly supportive but less affluent parents, for whom such a burden would "mean that the kids would have to go without uniform" because they were unable to support fund raising to the same extent.

The school had responded by asserting its belief in the comprehensive ideal in revised aims agreed in 1987. Totally mixed ability House and Tutor groups had attempted to integrate the pupils but staff were aware of

a "middle class culture" as shown in the Personal and Social Education evaluation in 1988 when topics such as unemployment, third world needs and multiculturalism had been ranked as "irrelevant to our needs" by over half the students. Staff and Governors alike were aware of the potential tensions as outlined in Taylor (1980) and there were fears that the vociferous parents, through their influence on policy making, might inhibit plans for curriculum development in the School .This was particularly worrying during the 1986-8 period of discussion on the impact of open enrolment when the need to maintain numbers was seen as essential for future success. In the event implementation of the National Curriculum and its methods of assessment and reporting have strengthened this community pressure towards a traditional approach.

The current situation is that Carterton School is confident that there will be a change of viewpoint as policies initiated by a newly appointed head in co-operation with the four primary schools emphasise inter-phase continuity, and as initiatives in day long community education draw many potential parents into the



school orbit as Macbeth, Strachan and Macaulay (1986) found in their investigation of Scottish schools. It is also possible that there will be some reaction to overcrowding at Burford, and more importantly to the reduction in Ministry of Defence support for boarding education which is already leading to a decline in those seeking such facilities. Local education authority policies are not explicit but there is evidence of rising rolls in all the surrounding areas of Oxfordshire and subsequent adjustment of catchment areas may promote a redistribution of students to build Carterton over the four form entry limit regarded as minimal for satisfactory curriculum development by the Department of Education and Science (1985) although it appears that "market forces" might determine when a school can no longer operate. In the Warwick investigation of Hereford and Worcester Schools (Tomlinson, 1990) there is evidence that this could be as low as one form of entry in isolated environments. Carterton, despite a local lobby based on "small is beautiful" does not fit this pattern.

Statements by local politicians during 1989 appeared to support the view that the local education authority would seek to rationalise provision within the area thus meeting the demands of the Audit Commission that surplus places should be taken out of use and demonstrating the assertion by Fowler (1973) that the "sum total of individual parental preferences .....will be the principal determinant, perhaps over several years, of which schools shall remain open and which close". The exercise of parental choice is thus seen to be of great significance and whilst the reasoning behind preference between the two schools can be relatively easily described it does not uncover, in many instances, the factors upon which the judgements about each school are made.

#### The Pattern of Preference Within Oxfordshire

Discussions with the area education officers in 1989 suggested that the Burford and Carterton tensions were not unique. The writer was allowed to analyse the preference cards submitted by all parents of pupils seeking places in Oxfordshire schools transferring at

11+, or 13+ within the Oxford City area. Detailed figures are given in Appendix 1 but the implications of increasing parental pressure to obtain entry to the school of their choice for their children, the reasons given for the choice, and the effects on the educational service provision within the county were such that the further investigation of the rationale for the judgement of school quality might inform policy development within schools.

Oxfordshire policy had been to maintain a clear catchment area for each school although this was complicated by the existence of voluntary aided church schools in Oxford and Banbury, and by two single sex schools within the City area. Stillman and Maychell (1986) in their analysis of the impact of the 1980 Education Act point to the impact of designated catchment areas as a factor inhibiting choice. Where these do not exist parents feel that they have a greater degree of choice; where they do exist parents feel that they have to "take on the system" to secure their preference. Oxfordshire invited parents to express their preference, including that for the designated school, and offered the

opportunity for reasons to be given although making it clear that the stated criteria for admission would be followed and, in the event of allowing preference out of area nearness to the school would be the first concern.

Of the 543 applications for an alternative school 439 parents gave 859 reasons for their choice, 7 with attached letters and 3 with medical notes. These reasons tended to be related to either the structure of the educational provision (211 mentions, including 54 seeking comprehensive education rather than the alternatives within a selective area of Buckinghamshire); social reasons including sibling attendance at the school (293 mentions), and reasons related to assessment of school quality (355 mentions).

These latter reasons were classified according to product and process factors as used by Elliott (1981) but there were also indications of the effectiveness of marketing strategies in securing some preferences and these were separately recorded. The analysis showed that there was greater concern for the process of education rather than with the outcomes measured in terms of



examination results; that 44 parents had used "reputation" as a factor in their judgement, and that visits and open days had had a considerable impact on 47 parents. These findings reflect the discussions of parental choice to be outlined in Chapter Two but they focused on some of the factors in judgement which were to be used as a basis for discussion with parents and students before commencing further empirical work in the case study schools.

The effect of permitted choice in a county where there were a considerable number of surplus places at the time of the investigation was to cause seven schools to gain at least two forms of entry whilst six schools lost at least two forms of entry - rendering them vulnerable as they fell below the four form entry size. Consideration of the "winners and losers" indicated that with one exception, those schools which had been former grammar schools (even if reorganised at least twenty years previously) and which maintained strong sixth forms and had a traditional approach were seen to be attractive despite problems associated with overcoming transport difficulties by out of area parents. The losers were

those seen to be recently reorganised secondary modern schools with the 11-16 range only, and with a local reputation for "progressive" methods. More significantly discussions with the heads of the schools concerned suggested that those pressing for their preference on school quality grounds were from the professional groups looking for a reflection of their own schooling as discussed by Johnson (1987).

#### Structure of Investigations for this Thesis

The Burford - Carterton case study demonstrates the complexity of perceptions of school quality by the various sections of the community and outlines the administrative effects of meeting parental preference. The Oxfordshire work showed that this was not particular to two schools but was a feature of admissions to several schools within the county. In order to establish the extent to which judgement is based on real knowledge, this thesis is concerned with an investigation of the ways in which the community perceptions match with the reality of the situation in individual school communities. It also considers the reasons for match and

mismatch, the ways in which case study schools have managed the situation and the impact which this has on the provision of an education service.

After consideration of the research material available on the issues connected with parent choice of schools, school effectiveness and the school in its relationships to the community, an explanation of methodology is outlined in Chapter Three. The structure of the empirical work begins with an investigation of the ways in which interest groups, defined as parents at entry, parents after two or three years of experience of the school, and the community, including past students, judge school quality. From this work some criteria were seen to be considered to be more important than others. These were then used as the basis of assessing community perceptions of the strengths of seven case study schools. The community opinions of these strengths were then set beside the reality of the evidence for the existence of these strengths within each school. From this some conclusions are drawn which might influence the management of reputation and the development of relationships between schools and their environment. The

impact of community opinion on parental choice, and thence on efficient arrangements for the provision of an effective education service is such that the greater the community understanding of objectivity in the judgement of school effectiveness the greater may be the match between opinion and reality. In conclusion some evaluation is made of the empirical approach used in this work and possibilities for further investigation are discussed.



## CHAPTER TWO

### BACKGROUND TO THE CURRENT INVESTIGATION

The relative strength of home and school influences in the educational process has long been a matter for investigation at national, local and school levels. As indicated in the previous chapter this study is concerned with the way in which communities have developed perceptions of local secondary schools and will examine how this has created pressures on school development following the more open access to schools as a result of the Education Acts of 1980, 1986 and 1988. Current concerns must be seen against the background of increased parental, and latterly community, involvement over the past thirty years. The examination of literature for this work was aimed at considering the theoretical basis of home-school relationships and the impact that this has had on parental involvement in school policy making. It was also concerned with the extension of this involvement out into the community served by the schools and to examine previous work on judgement of schools as

reflected in parental choice and community opinion. In order to provide some measure against which such opinion could be matched it was necessary to investigate previous work on objective and subjective indicators of school performance.

#### Increasing Recognition of Home and School Relationships

In the United States of America the Civil Rights Act of 1964 had highlighted the need for a study of educational disadvantage and this was presented as the National Survey of Public Schools in 1966. Coleman (1966), its principal author, had sought to establish a correlation between the resources base for different schools and standardised test performance but found this to be weak. The correlation between racial and social disadvantage and underachievement was however, significant. In policy terms this led to schemes for compensatory education and an attempt to support the disadvantaged through the "Headstart" programme including diverse approaches such as the T.V. programme "Sesame Street" aiming at pre-school influence of attitudes to learning and social relationships. Jencks (1972) supported by the work of MacNamara (1972) argued that

education should aim to help people to be compensated for their disadvantage through the development of basic cognitive skills. However, the early thrust of compensatory education as part of school delivered programmes was questioned when Jencks suggested that home background factors were more important than any school based enhancement and that these factors also affected employment potential far more than school achievement. He suggested that subsequent effort should be directed at parents as educators in a partnership. This view was enhanced by Bruner (1976) who urged the creation of supportive environments for language acquisition as a priority, and Bronfenbrenner (1975) who took this argument to the point of suggesting the need for mother-child joint involvement in any educational improvement programme compensating for the inequalities of contemporary society.

Similar findings were emerging from other studies amongst which the investigations of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (1973) showed that in developed countries home based

variables were consistently more effective than school factors in explaining achievement differences, and in Australia, Moore (1973) investigating culture clashes between home and school, concluded

"When home based educational objectives clash with school based educational objectives the student normally resolves the conflict by rejecting school. The key figures in this whole dynamic social complex are the parents". (p.63 ).

In the United Kingdom concern with the variety of educational experience and achievement within the primary education system and concern for the provision of equality of opportunity had led to the Plowden Report (1967) with an investigation of home influences, - expressed in terms of both material support and parental attitude - as well as of alternative approaches to learning within school. This work followed the Wiseman (1964) investigation of pupil achievement in Manchester, and Douglas (1964), in research on home influences on educational performance stressed the link between cultural deprivation and under achievement. All three investigations concluded that variations in parental



attitudes were more significant than home circumstances or variation between schools. The effect of this was to seek to encourage parental participation in school life. Bastiani (1987) chronicles the next twenty years as a period of communication between home and school, followed by a phase when accountability to parents was a recognised feature of home and school relationships, and this developed into the current period of participation as governors, classroom volunteers and as part of the educational partnership. The 1986 and 1988 Education Acts built upon these principles in matters such as the provision of information for parents, the requirement for annual parents meetings, and the recognition of the right to express a preference for a school and to have this honoured wherever administratively possible. For the purposes of this investigation the process of increased parental involvement is significant - just how do parents reach decisions regarding one school compared to another and how is this affected by the community perceptions of what constitutes a "good" school? Macbeth (1984) in a review of literature on the subject urges caution on the

general grounds that correlation is not causation; that education is a matter of complex relationships; that single factors have often been considered in isolation from this complexity and that measurement against predominantly cognitive achievement may well undervalue the true purpose of education. Nevertheless as handbooks such as Green (1968), Midwinter (1975), and the more recent work by Bastianni (1987) and Macbeth (1989) indicate that there is a growing awareness that the role of parents in the educational process is a major variable and there is increasing evidence from the 3351 responses to the Scottish Education Department "Talking About Schools" (1989) investigation that many parents are exercising this interest with increasing care. The significance of this growth of involvement is that parents are beginning to see participation in school organisation, and the ability to choose between schools, as a right supported by legislation. In exercising this right of choice they may also be making judgements about schools .

#### Parental Choice as a Right

Parental "preference" and possible choice of

school now assumes greater importance because of the financial provisions of the Education Reform Act (1988) and the subsequent guidance to local education authorities in devising schemes of local financial management (D.E.S.Circular 7/88) relating school income substantially to the number of pupils attending. This presupposes that the opportunities for freedom of choice are available to all parents but there are some for whom equality of educational opportunity is seen to be threatened by practice. This was investigated in depth some time before the 1988 Act by Leyserman (1983) who considered the effects of choice on equality of provision in Brent, London, and demonstrated that the effect of choice could be that those parents with the motivation, understanding and resources to exercise choice away from neighbourhood schools actually promote the decline of the schools set up to serve the local area. Similar work by Williams (1988) in South London hints at the effect of choice in securing the closure of unpopular schools to the detriment of an effective community education policy.

Developmental and educational arguments for

freedom of choice are based on the emotional tie between parent and child and the supposition that the parents know best what is the right educational environment for their child (Coons and Sugarman, 1978). There is also the philosophical contention that this right should be exercised on behalf of the child until there is opportunity for mature reasoning as investigated by Melden (1977). Of greater concern to those who see education as the inculcation of the highest human values (discussed in Pakeman, 1978) is the opportunity for neo-liberal consumerism based on Friedman (1971) where the role of the state is seen to be to provide a basic minimum educational service which can then be augmented according to "choice" principles. This was developed by Wedden (1981) on the assumption that choice would lead to increased parental participation with opportunities for poor families to become partners in the educational process. Her investigation of the voucher system as applied at Alum Rock, California, demonstrated that vouchers supplemented by additional aid for poor families and by free transport resulted in an increase of 8% in the number of parents moving from their neighbourhood



school in the second year of operation - although this meant that only 18% were exercising their option to do so. British voucher systems as a means of securing choice of school were seriously considered as a possibility following the 1979 election but shelved because it was felt that the local and national system were not then ready for such a radical approach. Seldon (1986) repeats the advantages of such a system, and suggests that by putting the parents into the purchasing role in educational provision instead of the government, the major tensions between government and the teaching unions will be removed because local survival of schools will be conditional upon their ability to meet parents' demands. The provision of choice for parents, including the opportunity to use alternative grant maintained schools if available, is seen as an alternative to the voucher system because it gives purchasing rights and hence, control. The consumer lobby has developed in the previous decade from public espousal of the view that education needed to become more accountable following concern at "progressive" primary and comprehensive

schools as demonstrated in the Black Papers (Cox and Dyson, 1969), and highlighted by the media outcry after the report of the management of affairs at William Tyndale School, London, (David, 1978). Awareness was increased by the active encouragement of parents to become more discerning in their evaluation of schools as reflected in Anderson (1982) where practical guidance is given to potential "customers". Annual educational supplements to Sunday newspapers such as the Sunday Mail, (August 1990), The Observer, (August 1990 and 1991), and The Sunday Times, (August 1990 and 1991) illustrate increasing awareness of the issue and indicate a parental willingness to exercise their rights in these matters.

#### The Legal Framework

The legal framework for parental involvement has changed significantly over the past decade. In response to the Report of the Taylor Committee (1977) the parental and community element of governing bodies was strengthened by legislative moves which finally reached the statute book in 1988 based on the concepts of encouraging parental involvement, building on the mutual relevance of school to the community and encouraging more

open relationships between parents and teachers in a power sharing complex (David 1987). Against this background there had been an encouragement of greater liberalism by some local education authorities in interpreting The Education Act 1944 Section 7b requirement to observe the wishes of parents in the choice of school

"so far as is compatible with the provision of efficient instruction and training and the avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure." This had been developed in the 1945 Model Articles of Government for secondary schools requiring parental wishes to be considered alongside school records and the general type of education considered most suitable for the particular child - in short there were so many caveats, particularly within a selective system, that preference was rarely honoured. The Education Act 1980 attempted to remedy this in Section 6 (1) where the duties of local education authorities were extended to make arrangements for parents to express a preference for a particular school backed, if desired, by reasons for the request. The

subsequent Regulations (1981) specified the minimum information of governor membership, aims, curriculum structure, discipline arrangements and examination results, which should be made available to all parents so that preference could be based on accurate detail. However, 1980 Act Section 6 (3) noted that arrangements for honouring preference would not apply if compliance would be prejudicial to efficient education or the efficient use of resources or where, in a selective system compliance with parental wishes would be incompatible with selection. Stillman (1988), in his analysis of the impact of the changed procedures under the 1980 Act stresses that the expression of a preference did not actually result in parents being able to choose the school felt to be appropriate for their child - many were unsuccessful in achieving this. Sections 7 (1) and (2) outlined appeals procedures where parents felt that their wishes had not been considered .

The local education authorities interpreted these requirements according to local political will and the strength of control over an "efficient" school provision. Stillman and Maychell (1986) suggested that a high



proportion of the 2,740 respondents in their investigation of reasons for choice were prepared to use other reasons for preference, such as accessibility, or maintaining contact with friends from the same primary school once they had been convinced by their own, or reported, observations that a school had high enough standards for it to enter into their consideration. The study also noted that the greater the perceived choice the greater the parental involvement in seeking information about the schools. It also showed that the longer the full time educational experience of parents and the higher their job classification the more likely they were to choose a distant school. At the same time the researchers found little correlation between social class and choice but a considerable willingness on the part of parents to exercise their preferences once they knew that this was a possibility. Appeals were undertaken by disappointed parents but the preference was rarely effective especially across authority boundaries or where voluntary aided schools were exercising governors' rights of control of admissions Williams(1988). It is however,

possible that there was greater social class correlation with those parents of some 10,000 pupils each year prepared to "fight" at appeal, and Adler, Petch and Tweedie (1989) demonstrated the willingness and competence of socially adept parents to embark on this procedure.

The Education Act 1988 ensures a greater degree of choice by allowing schools to grow to the standard admission number which had obtained in 1979 at the height of a bulge in pupil numbers. Although there are arrangements for Governors to reduce this admission number, and conversely, possibilities for expansion (Section 27), rational admission criteria are needed to ensure there is demonstrable fairness in the allocation of places at oversubscribed schools. Oxfordshire, for example, allows admissions to school capacity initially with priority for siblings of present or past pupils, then admitting others according to nearness of home to school. This ensures that the application of known criteria can be understood by parents who might be disappointed. Such a scheme does not, however, meet valid educational reasons which a parent might press and these

are often only heard at appeal. In a period of stable or falling rolls there is available capacity for parental choice to be more fully honoured and this is further extended in some areas by voluntary aided schools, grant maintained schools and City Technical Colleges. The extent to which there is real choice has yet to be quantified but Williams (1988) in an investigation of the operation of parental preference in one area of the Inner London Education Authority with a marked semi-independent sector has concluded that

"it is no coincidence that many of the more unpopular maintained schools tend to be located in urban areas rife with poor employment opportunities, poor housing and social amenities....Consequently one's social and economic circumstances can be seen as a major determinant in the kinds of choices or access families have to qualitative resources in education as well as in other services." (p.112 ).Preference statistics for the four years 1983 - 6 show the eight voluntary aided schools in the study to be oversubscribed by 20% whilst the maintained sector schools were undersubscribed by 23%, -

a considerable degree of unfulfilled preference. Indeed there is concern that the existence of the semi-independent sector as well as the independent schools is a factor in choice which further complicates the reality of parental evaluation of schools.

It has already been demonstrated that in areas where independent schools exist there is a tendency to conservatism of practice and organisation in the maintained sector, ( Fowler, 1973), and this may well reduce effective choice within an area. Deal (1985) following the findings of the U.S.A National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) has suggested that it is in the acceptance of a corporate symbolism and culture that schools may find a way to improvement in the public eye albeit at the price of surrender of certain principles of social justice or curriculum development. In his view a return to "traditional values" expressed in the annual ritual of the school may enhance local confidence in the school as an institution even though this may be inappropriate. The apparent return to speech days, or their equivalent, as a feature of most secondary schools provides evidence for the contention that schools



are now "playing to their market". Concern at the implications of open enrolment for school organisation and the pressures for change in educational philosophy which may inhibit school philosophy in a local area has been detailed by Dakers (1988) and Swales (1989) and part of the current investigation is concerned to consider the way in which schools do react to local opinion. In terms of social justice, the greater the degree of freedom, especially across L.E.A. boundaries, the more pressure there is on popular schools and this may inhibit admissions from the local area. This has been demonstrated in the London Borough of Barnet where local admissions to successful schools have been inadmissible because geographically nearer students from the neighbouring boroughs have been given priority.

Parental willingness to exercise choice, and then to test the legal system through appeals, or in some instances, subterfuge, implies that there are reasons for them to wish to select a school other than that designated for them by administrative arrangements. Considerable research work has been undertaken in England

and Scotland in the past decade to ascertain the basis for this choice of schools.

#### The Reasons for Parental Preference

An important distinction was made by Elliott (1981) in a small scale but significant investigation of the intake to one comprehensive school which sought to separate process and product factors in parental preference for schools. Process factors are those connected with the way in which the school operates, product factors are those connected with outcomes such as examination results and employment rates. Elliott established the existence of a recurrent theme in parental choice when he noted that the personal happiness of the child in the school experience was of major significance to many parents whilst the product factors appeared to be less significant at the time of choice of school.

Like Elliott, Johnson and Ransom (1983) were concerned with broader issues of home school relationships but their investigation of families at four comprehensive schools showed a similar awareness of a child focused choice which reflected consideration of the way in which, given temperament, friendship grouping

and ability, the needs of the child would be met by any one school.

Both of these investigations were undertaken before the 1980 Education Act had highlighted preference but subsequent investigations have shown that parents continue to be concerned about the possible happiness of the child but there is also evidence that a successful school, described in terms of the educational experience of the students, also tends to be at least acceptable in its product factors (Reid, Hopkins and Holly, 1987).

This was also investigated by the National Foundation for Educational Research who sponsored an investigation of the rationale and impact of parental choice between 1983 and 1985 and this is reported in Stillman and Maychell, (1986). The aims of the project were to discover the extent of real choice, the nature of L.E.A. procedures and the factors influencing choice of school. The study examined choice in two urban areas, one selective and one comprehensive, and two rural areas similarly selective and non-selective. Although the investigation was concerned with wider issues such as the

impact of catchment area policy and of published criteria for admission to schools in the authorities, it was also concerned with the influence of administrative procedures on the exercise of choice. Their appendix 5.1 summarises the 7,689 reasons for choice given by 2,245 respondents. The classification of responses is based on geographic, academic, facilities, pastoral care, school type, teacher and head attributes, recommending agents, child and family reasons and a miscellaneous group of reasons which did not fit this classification. The researchers used the additional choice reason of geography as well as the product and process factors suggested by Elliott and conclude that process reasons were important for 52% of the respondents, with 38% of parents suggesting that the single process factor of good discipline was important in their choice of school. However, most parents used a combination of factors and very few made choices on the basis of product only - there was more to choice than the hoped for outcomes.

At the same time the Inner London Education Authority investigated the reasons for preference at the point of transfer from primary to secondary education in



fifty schools over a four year period as reported in the bulletins issued in 1985 and 1986, although not published as a research paper. It must be remembered that the I.L.E.A. proforma for transfer actually listed criteria by which parents could make their choice including sibling attendance, residence in a defined priority area, attendance at a primary school linked to a particular secondary school, proximity or convenience of travelling arrangements, single sex schooling and attendance at church schools. The detailed investigation however, (I.L.E.A.,1985) ascertained that 65% of choice was a reflection of the child's wish although 40% said that this was a joint parent-child agreement. This is significant in that it reflects the Elliott finding of the reaction between the child and the process features of the school. Like Stillman and Maychell, however, the most important process factors were associated with discipline and behaviour, noted by 48% of the respondents, and then the most important single product feature was good exam results noted by 38%. This investigation also explored the concept of reputation and

is important in that it informed the planning of the empirical research for the current study because it established the sources of recommendation for 24% of respondents noting the views of friends and others in gathering information about schools, and 13% acknowledging the advice of primary school heads.

Consequent upon the Education (Scotland) Act 1981 there was a much increased opportunity for parental choice and this was documented by Adler, Petch, and Tweedie, (1989). Like Stillman and Maychell they sought to investigate the workings of the system as a whole and matters of parental preference were seen as part of a major study of the impact of choice on educational provision. Investigation of the workings of administrative arrangements and the management of appeals was followed by seeking the reasons for choice of school by 853 respondents drawn from four differing socio-economic and educational environments. The sample was designed to include about half who had exercised choice outside their designated school, and half who had been apparently content to accept the local school. The investigation was into the reasons for both positive

choice and negative rejection and this allowed two views of the the rationale for choice. This work builds on the University of Glasgow (1986) concept of the push and pull factors of comparison examined in 153 schools at that time. The Adler, Petch and Tweedie findings are detailed because the information was obtained by seeking the four most important reasons for each decision of rejection and acceptance with a ranking of the importance of responses. Rejection was based on "We don't think that the child will be happy there" mentioned by 14% of parents, rejection by the child for a further 14% and poor discipline mentioned by 8.9% overall. More positively 16.4% of the parents considered their child would be happier at the preferred school, 13.4% mentioned the child's wishes, and 8.75% spoke of the reputation for good discipline. Again, this research points to the preponderance of humanistic rather than technological reasons for choice and indicates that matters of discipline are the most significant process factor. The study also investigated the sources of information about schools and although 69% of parents gathered their

information from visits to the school of choice, 13.8% gained their opinions from other children in the area, 38% from the experience of other children in other schools, 32% from other parents, 20.9% from other friends and 50.3% from primary heads. Clearly many views were sought in establishing choice but there is also evidence that judgement of schools, irrespective of whether or not it was to be preferred for a particular child, depends to a large extent upon hearsay and the opinion of others. This is fundamental to the current research which is concerned with judgement rather than choice.

Part of the aim of the Scottish Education Department survey (1989) was to examine the question of judgement by asking "What makes a good school?". This built upon the University of Glasgow research mentioned earlier which had ascertained that the reasons for choice of school were fairly evenly divided between those associated with views of a particular school and those associated with "non school" reasons. The large scale research in 1986-8 asked a standard 170 questions in 3,351 interviews and then followed this with 100 open-ended discussions lasting up to three hours with each



family interviewed. This differs from other investigations in that there is such a high level of personal contact and also because the questions are directed at the factors considered in judgement of schools. Good discipline is mentioned by 54% of secondary respondents, followed by accessibility (48%), good teaching (47%) and reputation (36%). The inclusion of a non-process factor, i.e. proximity to the school, even with the degree of direction there was for respondents, indicates the complexity of judgement analysis. Judgements of what is good are seen to be highly subjective and, in the absence of detailed school information, "mythology and local legend" were strong influences. The research team probed the notion of goodness and found that in addition to appreciation of extra-mural activities, uniform and ritual, parents were prepared to attempt to define the ethos of the school in terms of impression, atmosphere, interest, teacher responsiveness, purposeful activity and a pervading feeling of relaxed but controlled corporate life. Even so the element of subjective judgement is still of

importance - just how are opinions formed? For the current investigation there is much to be learned from the views of one parent on the mythology of a good school when she said

"the way I judge a school is by other parents' children because most children go to the local school. If the general area in which you live seems to grow nice children I feel this is a pretty good reflection of the local school". (Pamphlet 2. p.8).

Three later investigations echo the findings detailed above in that most parents show a combination of process and product factors in rationalising their choice of school and link these with the perceived happiness of the child. West and Varlaam (1991) in interviews with 72 parents at the time of primary to secondary transfer found that the four most important factors were that the child wanted to attend the chosen school, there was good discipline and good examination results, and the school was easily accessible. After prompting, parents saw the most important process factors to be good teachers, good discipline and good pupil-teacher relationships. Following the same theme of reasons for choice and

working within the Sheffield Metropolitan Area, Boulton and Coldron have demonstrated the importance of the way in which children are believed to be "going to be happy" with the choice of school made. It may be that this is because of the nature of the process factors in the organisation of the school or because of the social relationships already built with peers at primary school or because of parental interpretation of the advantages of either single sex or church affiliated education. Hunter (1991) in an investigation of the link between school organisation and parental choice in 18 schools confirmed that judgements had been made on the basis of reputation for discipline and examination results but that choice was affected by a wish for single-sex education or by ease of access to the school. Fundamental to later work in this thesis is the way in which the stated "reputation" grows; choice may be related to other factors.

Investigation of the basis upon which parents and the community make judgements of schools has now become an important analytical tool in ascertaining the

strengths and weaknesses of individual institutions as shown by Doubleday (1990) and Hanford (1990), and it appears that many schools are using this approach in order to plan both community relationships and marketing strategies.

Parental choice may create pressures either at local authority level as in the maintenance of selective education in Buckinghamshire or at school level as shown by the "opting out" of Stantonbury Campus to ensure the maintenance of non-selective education in the same county. In the redevelopment of Sladebrook School, Brent, (Leyserman, 1983) effects on curriculum and organisational policy were shown to be considerable when pressure for change was demonstrated by large numbers of parents looking for alternative provision. As discussed in Chapter One this has been conceptualised as an example of "exit, voice and loyalty" as explained by Hirschman (1970). Johnson (1987) has shown in her analysis of the motivation of parents choosing between private and state sectors that some are prepared to leave the system altogether to obtain an alternative provision, often related to their own experience of schooling; some are



prepared to remain within the state system but exert individual or collective pressure for the consideration of change, whilst others have a "special attachment" for the organisation, in this case the local school, and are prepared to defend policies and practice. Adler and Raab (1986) have discussed this with reference to the distance parents are prepared for their children to travel in order to meet their requirements at a chosen school, and Echols, McPherson and Willms (1990) have demonstrated the likelihood of positive exercise of choice by parents from skilled manual or higher social groups who are more than seven times more likely to achieve a placement away from the local school. The impact of such pressures is conditioned by the actual or perceived effectiveness of schools and this has been investigated in parallel with the investigation of parental and community judgement to see how far the two elements, actual and perceived school success, match.

### School effectiveness

School effectiveness has been the subject of much investigation since the publication of the findings of

Ainsworth and Batten (1974) who considered the school careers of pupils from 44 primary schools as they moved into different secondary schools. They considered the effects of characteristics such as headteacher quality, social atmosphere and first impressions of the school on eventual pupil achievement. Significant in both the public interest and further work generated was the research of Rutter et al, (1979) who attempted to assess the impact of school experience on pupils at twelve London comprehensive schools in a similar geographic environment. Their research considered physical and administrative features of the schools, the school process including attitudes and expectations, rewards and punishments, responsibilities and participation, pupil conditions including the nature of relationships with staff, the stability of teaching and friendship groups and staff organisation. They demonstrated the complexity of relationships between factors and posed further questions concerning management and leadership styles, planned change , and consideration of the link between school policies and classroom practice. Much of this work has been carried forward by others extending and

developing the concepts of school climate suggested by Halpin (1966), and although the methodology of the Rutter research and the central concept of the ethos of the school were questioned by many, as summarised in Wragg (1979) and Kelley (1981), there was widespread acceptance of the identification of greater achievement in all aspects of educational development in those schools which demonstrated a positive leadership, a fair and understood system of rewards as well as punishments, a well developed pastoral care system and unquantifiable but important environmental standards.

The complex of characteristics which constitute ethos or school climate and which give each school an autonomous existence as expressed by Schmuk (1984), have been investigated at length. Gray, McPherson and Raffe (1983) followed through the organisational histories of schools as an influence on pupil outcomes: pupil participation opportunities have been considered by Epstein (1981) and Scheerer (1981) building on the McPartland and Epstein (1976) concepts of the quality of school life; Deal and Kennedy (1983) have considered the

influence of school culture and ritual on student outcomes; Galloway (1982,1983) has investigated the nature of supportive staff-student relationships, and much work has been undertaken on the nature of effective leadership. This includes that by Derr and De long (1982), Hargreaves (1982) and the considerable action research in the primary sector outlined by Mortimore et al (1988).

There is general agreement that organisational and process characteristics of effective schooling can now be identified as discussed by Austin and Reynolds (1990), who summarise major research of the past decade - the complex of leadership, vision, staff development and consistent treatment of students develops the school climate idea further. Prosser (1991) has suggested that there is value in looking at school culture in terms of national or local authority settings within which unique school norms are identifiable, interpreted as the tone of the school community and perceived by the community at large as the ethos of the school. It is this latter quality which so frequently determines the judgement made by those who come into contact with the school. The



problems of collecting and interpreting quantitative data have been detailed by Cuttance (1988) who stresses the need for consistency in selecting samples, gathering data and checking the validity of any explanations. The public at large accept local qualitative comment without such caution as is frequently shown in the annual publication of examination statistics in the local press.

Recent effective schools work has been characterised by school self-evaluation and self-improvement with considerable attention being paid to strategies for producing effective change as demonstrated by Phillips, Davie and Callely (1985), and in the consideration of alternative forms of organisation as outlined by Reid, Hopkins and Holly (1987). Indeed the emphasis is not now so much on an analysis of the factors which explain effectiveness but rather on comparative studies which illustrate effectiveness in action as summarised by Reynolds (1990). Austin and Reynolds (1990) stress that awareness of the factors which make for school success may be fundamental for effective management and move the argument forward into the

discussion of the role of institutional development planning which requires consideration of parental expectations and community relationships. Miles (1987) has investigated the role of research into effectiveness in coping with educational change and highlights the problem of communicating with multiple audiences - a major problem in establishing the basis of the local relationships between school and community during a period of poorly understood change. For the purposes of the current study much importance also attaches to the work of Gray (1990) who considers that the indicators of success in the educational process are of limited significance if they do not allow consideration of what the educational experience means to the student. This requires identification of the cultural background and past school experience of the student. Gray argues that the indicators used should also include reference to the quality of relationships between the individual student and the teachers and the way in which these relationships are seen to be meaningful by the student. These students will influence others as a result of their own experience and may well become a significant influence an opinion of

the school in the local community.

The link between the predominating management style of a school and the school experience is being investigated in depth by the Centre for Successful Schools at Keele University over the period 1989 to 1993 but early work in one school demonstrates that this is of fundamental importance to staff, students, parents and the community. Where there is an openness between students and staff, readiness to include all interest groups in policy discussion and a genuine partnership between these groups there is more evidence of success than in more authoritarian or repressive schools. (Brighouse, 1991)

There has been much work on the organisational character of schools (Bush, 1986, 1989), (Handy and Aitken, 1986) and there is evidence that parents recognise the value of open management styles as shown in the interviews for the Scottish Education Department (1989) investigation of parents views of schools. Analysis of the complex interaction of pupil and staff related factors making for effectiveness has posed methodology problems instanced in the Rutter (1979) work where an

attempt was made to allow for the varying nature of the intake and process in their relationship to outcomes. In the Madaus, Airasion and Kellaghan (1980) reassessment of United States research attention was drawn to the opportunities for semantic misrepresentation and Reynolds and Reid (1985) urge the disaggregation of the totality of investigation with a strongly statistical basis to greater consideration of individual students if the process of effective schooling is to be understood. These observations led to an investigation of contemporary analytic techniques as a basis for the collection and interpretation of data.

#### Mathematical Investigation of Data

Mathematical analysis is now being used to attempt to ascertain the inter-relationship between factors in the educational process. It is now possible to identify a range of factors which might explain success in school organisation and the educational experience of students. Analysis is being directed at the link between single or grouped process factors and successful outcomes. Problems arise because of variation in the available data on pupil attainment at the age of transfer and because of



variation in the outcomes by which eventual achievement is measured. However, inter factor relationships are now being more fully explored through the use of computerised regression techniques which allow the effects of combinations of factors to be analysed. This is illustrated by Jesson and Gray (1991) and the impact of process on outcomes is being more fully understood through their work which examines combinations of factors in the improvement of individual attainment between entering and leaving secondary schools. Kennedy, Teddlie and Springfield (1991) have further developed this technique to relate the attitudes of students and staff to achievement in successful schools. Whilst offering an analytic model they also highlight the problems inherent in quantitative analysis of "attitudes" which may be subject to multiple interpretation.

The use of measurable outcomes such as examination results, or numbers moving to higher education is seen to be flawed without cognisance of the background against which there has been change. Part of the problem in securing community understanding of school effectiveness

is that intake factors of disadvantage and low attainment are often ignored as investigated by Nuttall et al (1989). It is important to evaluate outcomes from the base at which the school starts its work. Schagen (1990) has related the outcomes of the Assessment of Performance Unit mathematics tests to the longitudinal process of maths education as reflected in sex, class size, homework arrangements, and pupil teacher ratio. Such work demonstrates a degree of correlation but the complexity of success indicators once again inhibits understanding of the process of education by parents and the community at large.

#### Performance Indicators

The use of simple performance indicators as the sole measure of educational success without reference to the school and community background are implied in sections 25-28 inclusive of the Department of Education and Science "aide memoire" published in November 1989. In the proposals for the Local Management of Schools (D.E.S Circular 7/88) attention to monitoring and evaluation is sought as part of each local scheme building upon the Coopers and Lybrand advice to the D.E.S. (1988). No

mention is made of the background factors in the Circular but the Coopers Lybrand list does emphasise factors such as socio-economic background and innate ability of pupils. Problems appear to arise when parents and the community judge school effectiveness on measurable outcome indicators alone. Smith and Tomlinson (1989) argue for a combination of factors which build into a general picture of school achievement. Dennison (1990) traces the growth of consumerism and its relationship to education concluding with the view that ---"the potential benefits of performance indicators cannot be overvalued. Decisions about resource allocation and utilisation can then be linked to achievement" (p.11). Marketing strategies are therefore seen to be an inevitable result, and the basis for marketing may well be presented in the statistical form which provides maximum advantage. Bell (1991) urges that school effectiveness studies are still to be regarded as an inexact science not only because of the nature of the classifications used e.g. in terms such as socio-economic status, but also in judgements which are given some statistical quality but which are

inherently subjective such as "good science teaching". The publication of National Curriculum test scores falls into this category with a potential for unfortunate consequences in an under resourced school, or one "disadvantaged" by the nature of its intake.

### Marketing the School

As a result of media attention to both the broader issues of education and the distinction between the "good" and the "bad", schools are becoming more aware of the need for marketing as a factor in raising public awareness of what they have to offer. The existence of open enrolment has exacerbated this situation. The effects of this have been outlined by Sayer and Williams (1989). At the same time the developing voice of parent organisations through the National Federation of Parent-Teacher Associations, the Advisory Centre for Education and local pressure groups (Woods, 1988) is having a significant effect in alerting parents to their rights and opportunities as a result of recent legislation.

Awareness of the need to market has come to the schools from the work undertaken by further education



institutions involved in the responsive college programme as detailed in Coombe Lodge report No. 20 (1988). This build on the principles of marketing detailed by Kotler and Fox (1985) who suggested that institutions should examine their own market place and set forward policies which would ensure that it is meeting the needs of the market with a product which is acceptable and understood. The principles of commercial marketing have been considered in the educational environment and the applicability of approaches in the commercial field to the world of education has been examined by Gray (1989). Schools are being urged to consider their public relations strategies, the ways in which they present themselves to the community, the ways in which they meet the demands of the community and the collection of data upon which future market planning can be based. The emergence of such strategies in the case study schools in this investigation is a recurrent theme underpinning growing acceptance of competitiveness between schools. Whilst market management may bring some change the work of Johnson (1987) in detailed discussion with 25 families

reflecting on their choice of independent or maintained, comprehensive or selective education suggest that the reputation of schools may well hinge on events long past or on comments passed through the community without substance or investigation. Consideration of this issue became fundamental in the analysis of responses from the case study schools and reflects the considerable work which has been undertaken on the uniqueness of the relationship between the school and the community it serves. It was important, therefore to examine the literature which might go some way to explain this relationship.

#### The School in its Setting

The community which judges the effectiveness of schools is the same community which supports, or denies, their development. Eggleston (1977), in a pioneer study, investigated the school, in relation to its socio-economic environment and compared this with the ecological relationship in biology. At the macro level, comparable to the global setting in nature, he considered the major support systems. At the micro level he extended

the concept into the classroom and immediate learning environment examining pupil-pupil and pupil-teacher relationships. He concluded that there is great variation in the ecological setting of authorities, schools, classrooms and individuals. There is therefore, a variety of support to which the individual school may have access.

The complexity of inter-related factors in the school environment is explored together with consideration of the ability of educational institutions to "resist disturbance and adapt to unavoidable change" (p.112) but emphasis is placed on the importance of individual perceptions of the ecological environment and this is fundamental to the present study of the way in which the community at large develops views of their local schools. This must be seen against increased involvement over the past thirty years.

Halsey (1978) argued that the concentration of compensatory education had initially been towards the reparation of disadvantage and subsequently on changing attitudes, a view consistent with that later expressed by Johnson and Ransom (1983) in their description of a

changing emphasis on the way in which schools saw the role of parents, but that there was need for consideration of the total environment in which the educational process took place. Bastiani (1987) took this further in his analysis of the stages of compensation, communication, accountability, and participation, demonstrating that schools were at different points along the path to attaining the latter objective. Alongside this development the school had become increasingly integrated with the environment as envisaged by Halsey, building on the principles of community education evident since Henry Morris in Cambridgeshire in the 1920s (Ree, 1985). The report of the Plowden Committee (1967) paragraph 117 had suggested that schools

"should be open beyond normal hours for the use of children, their parents and exceptionally for other members of the community". This did not go far enough for many advocates of community education including Midwinter (1973a,b) who sought means of developing an awareness of the needs, wants and aspirations of the area within which



the school could develop a mutual sense of community. Hatch and Moylan (1972) suggested practical ways in which this might be achieved and almost imperceptibly there grew an awareness of the fusion of parents and community as partners in a broader educational scheme as reflected in Bond (1973), Lynch and Pimlott (1976), and Craft, Rayner and Cohen (1980). In the 1980s this has occurred within many schools either by design on the part of the local education authority, or by curriculum development activated by a sense of mission to the community, by recognition of interdependence as a source of curriculum strength, or through encouragement by devices such as the Schools Curriculum Award and the Royal Society of Arts "Education for Capability". Watts (1980, 1981) had seen that there was a sense in which school and community boundaries needed to become blurred and pioneering organisations in Leicestershire, Manchester and Milton Keynes among others, have shown the potential for education as a total experience. Work experience, community studies and other curricular initiatives as shown in The School Book (Peers School, 1988), have broadened the experience of students, increased the

understanding of educational practice within the local community and enhanced the degree of mutual involvement.

Watts (1989) sees this as

"negotiated communal learning for a common purpose" and deprecates the convoluted management structures which may inhibit this. The outcome is that the community now has increasingly firm opinions on the processes and personalities involved in local schools and the complexity of relationships is such that the "grapevine" is a powerful influence affecting local opinion.

Mays (1980 ) drew attention to the potential problems arising from cultural differences in perpetuating neighbourhood values which might be alien to the aims of the educators. This may well be reflected in the selection of criteria by which parents and communities judge their schools. Lane (1972) had shown the contrast between the encouragement of a wider view of education by white collar career families in a secure and progressive environment and the uncertain and fluctuating attitude of those involved in blue collar jobs where education appears irrelevant for the task of factory

work. Roberts (1971) extended this argument to suggest that it is middle class interest, with a concentration on academic success and social mobility, rather than working class culture, with limited educational and social horizons, which is responsible for the persistence of inequality in education. He maintains that it is the former which dictates the nature of the school environment rather than the latter for whom the cultural environment might need to be different if disadvantage is to be overcome. Riseborough (1981) sees this clash as a manifestation of class differences and tension in social values and Murphy (1989) relates this to race, education and intellectual prejudice. Bourdieu (1973) had seen the dilemma of social class as essentially self perpetuating and the comparatively low expression of preference for schools estimated by Stillman at 8 -10% before the 1988 Act (Stillman, 1988) may reflect the validity of this. Meyer and Rowan (1977) suggested that part of the problem with educational improvement resulted from the tendency of schools to institutionalise social groupings and thus reinforce division. Newson and Newson, (1987), have investigated the relationship between pupil

participation and the work experience of parents and demonstrated how the range of cultural interest, the readiness to follow enquiry methods, parental involvement, the use of books at home and help with reading at home appear to decline from the professional to the manual work groups with a consequent loss of benefit to the pupil as intermediary. Connell (1987) has suggested that there is a differing expectation of educational processes and outcomes which may affect parental preference for schools. He sees the professionals as seeking education for living, with a willingness to support a progressive format; middle management looking for education to produce results, with an emphasis on traditional practice, and the working class seeking education for survival in workplace structures with a conformity which aids this. Bradford (1990) has demonstrated the geographical relationship between social class and the availability of choice concluding that despite all attempts at ensuring choice there is a tendency for this to be much more limited in socially deprived areas.



The expression of class differences through the existence of the maintained and independent sectors as separate provision has been investigated by Johnson (1987). Parental preference, except in a minority of assisted places and scholarships, is based upon ability to pay and may well enhance the consumerism of those who have this choice but it does show the need for investigation of the motives of those who have chosen to seek education for their children in the independent sector. If there is a class relationship then it is possible that a "pecking order" could, or has, developed in the state sector and this may emerge in some of the rationale for parental preference of schools. The implications of the local management of schools are that to a large extent enrolment will determine income for the school. It is therefore important to recognise parental expectations but whilst there are differing resource bases there can be little hope of securing the social equality which Macleod (1989) among many others has seen as a goal of education. The impact of parental choice on the nature and provision of schools is affected by the concept of judgement and the possible effects are already

a matter for discussion in educational policy planning.

### The Effect of Preference on Educational Policy

The effects of choice are of considerable importance in the development of educational policy regarding the nature and provision of schools. Bash and Coulby (1989) argue that the open market orientation exacerbates divisions in society by favouring those with the cultural resources to make informed choices and to meet the costs involved in using alternative schools. Those remaining in a disadvantaged neighbourhood school, despite the fall in pupil numbers and the hope of a more individualised learning and support system, may find it lacking essential resources to the point of closure unless the local education authority has some power to intervene by using support from the remaining 7 - 10% of the L.E.A. aggregate budget retained for central purposes. Fielding (1987) has shown that in the three schools of a Somerset market town in the previous three years 1621 out of 1701 pupils were given their first choice school. Of the 80 refused 27 appealed and 21 were then allowed to go to their first choice school leaving

0.3% forced to accept a school they did not wish to attend. The application of Education Act (1988) Sections 26 - 32 will however allow all 80 to attend their first choice school because of the liberal limits of the 1979 admission figures. The result would be that instead of three schools of five form entry there could be two of six or seven form entry and one of three form entry. Closure of the small unit would appear to be the logical move but he points out that this would then result in overcrowding the remaining schools - "three into two won't go". Maclure (1989) suggests that policy will be affected by vindicated choice as schools which are perceived by parents and community to be "good" become supported and on the strength of this become good whilst the reverse is true for those schools which do not enjoy public confidence. The long term political implications of this have been stressed by Tomlinson (1989) in suggesting that educational ghettos might result. Hart (1988) extends this by pointing out the segregation which would result if travel expenses to the preferred school are denied by the local authority.

The provisions of the 1988 Act including National Curriculum and assessment, the publication of results, open enrolment and local management of schools are designed to increase parental concern for the quality of education which their children are receiving by building on earlier legislation allowing expression of preference on the basis of a legal minimum of published information. Morgan (1989) sees this as a means of control of the teaching force because they would need to respond to parental expectations in order to maintain numbers in their schools - a brake on the progressivism under attack since the 1960s. Whatever the political motive the effect of the legislation is that parents now have a much greater interest in the local educational standards and their interest affects future policy.

### Conclusion

This introduction has been concerned with outlining by means of a research review the framework against which parents exercise their preference. It has shown the ways in which there is an increasing parental and community interest in the work of schools although it



is recognised that the degree of interest may well be limited because of class differentiation and the social environment. It has underlined two important distinctions. The first is between the rationale for choice of school and the basis upon which the community makes and develops its judgement of a school. The second, between the process and the product factors which affect such opinion forming. It is hoped that the current investigation might consider the validity of community opinion of schools by looking at indicators of school effectiveness. The evidence quoted has suggested that the concept of school effectiveness is difficult to measure except in qualitative terms and may well be subject to local interpretation because it is now regarded as a legitimate interest for parents and community alike. The purpose of the work is to examine some perceptions which may be held about individual schools and to test these against measurable and qualitative criteria which might indicate whether community evaluation of schools can be objectively sustained. If so there are implications for the communications network between schools and the communities which they serve. Whatever the degree of

match between the believed and real qualities of schools, the nature of the grapevine and the effect that this has on educational provision has significance for schools as they come to terms with their communities in the open enrolment situation. The ideal has been outlined by Wilson and Corcoran (1989) in the following manner,

"When the community members come to know a school, they inevitably understand the problems and pressures and often become sympathetic advocates for the school; thus forging links to the community helps maintain the legitimacy of the school in its larger surrounding environment."

(Success for Secondary Schools, p. 117)

## CHAPTER THREE

### ESTABLISHING RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Burford Carterton case study in Chapter 1 illustrates the importance of community perceptions of local schools as a basis for choice by parents, particularly in its effect on the recruitment of pupils. The existence of the "grapevine" as a means of parental information is demonstrated in the ILEA report (1985), and in the subsequent work by the Scottish Education Department (1989). Adler, Petch and Tweedie (1989) demonstrate the subjectivity of many of the criteria upon which schools are judged. Their work in seeking both positive reasons for choice of school and negative reasons for rejection shows a readiness by parents to use evaluative terminology. "Better", "reputation for", "happier", "not satisfied" - are all examples of this, and parents react to messages about schools from a variety of sources and then apply these as the criteria for selection as shown in some of the appeals data collected by Stillman and Maychell (1986). The comparison of a range of reports did however, show

that there were methodological problems needing further consideration in establishing the basis of community perceptions of school effectiveness.

The position of the writer as researcher needs clarification. As headteacher of Burford School involvement in qualitative judgements about either of the schools described in the first chapter would not have been acceptable. Consequently it was not possible to say whether community opinion or judgement was valid. In order to test the existence of a match between perceptions and reality it was necessary to consider a group of schools where the independence of the researcher was recognised. This was possible but inevitably the experience of eighteen years of headship, linked to involvement with the case study schools over a two year period, resulted in some judgements about aspects of school quality which arose from professional intuition. This might be considered comparable to "H.M.I. speak" where qualitative assertions may be made on a basis of reaction to a total classroom or school situation. This is fundamental to the final section of each case study where an overall assessment is attempted for each school. In this respect the writer has to presume upon the trust



which readers might feel they can accord this work. This is an additional problem in adopting a methodology of a subjective nature.

### The Subjectivity of Case Study Investigation

Case study data as explained by Adelman, Jenkins and Kemiss (1977) whilst presenting the "detail of a single instance" suffers from the involvement of the observer and the conceptual pluralism between observer, observed and reader because the totality of the environment can only be appreciated by those who are part of the feature under review. Unless there is complete objectivity in analysis of the situation there may be bias in reporting and the analysis may be affected by the philosophical stance of the observer . This was demonstrated in the way in which a locational analysis of the applicants from Carterton was shown to be from one area of the town but this was immediately interpreted by one member of the staff of the school as "the officers' children - the upwardly mobile!" ( see Burgess (1984).

Similarly the easy acceptance of data yielded by a simple survey may be highly suspect as detailed by Madaus, Airasion and Kellaghan (1980) in their

consideration of school effectiveness evidence. Stressing again that "correlation is not causation" they showed that differences exist between schools because of differing corporate personalities and their reaction to their personal and group interpretations of circumstances – a factor of considerable importance in evaluating community interpretations of the work of schools. This was shown in the work on the Oxfordshire choices in 1989, where there is evidence that parents may have used alternative "structural" reasons for choice whilst actually motivated by their own interpretation of the ethos, organisation and relationships within a particular school. This certainly appears to be true of the three most popular schools where the proportion of parents actually visiting the schools was described as "low" by the staff responsible for parent liaison. Choice could not have been made on "real" evidence, but rather on interpretations of what has been experienced in the past, or heard about from others (Miles and Huberman, 1984). Discussion with three of the heads involved in Oxfordshire indicated that many decisions were made on the basis of "choosing the lesser of two evils", in general this was the more traditional of the schools,

because of a predilection for a return to the old grammar school system, or because a move to the independent sector was not financially possible. This accords with the Adler, Petch and Tweedie (1989) findings and with the discussion in Johnson (1987) and Hunter (1991). The present investigation is not concerned primarily with the establishment of causal links between any aspect of school effectiveness and choice decisions. It is rather concerned with determining the validity of community assessment in seven case study schools by comparing the perceived and the actual quality of individual schools.

The work is fraught with problems arising from interpretations of vocabulary used, of eliciting the real reasons for decisions taken rather than the expressed answers to a questioner who might be seen to be a representative of the "system" which parents may be attempting to manipulate, and because many of the qualities of schools under consideration are capable of multiple interpretation. In the Oxfordshire survey this was demonstrated by two requests for admission to one school, one because of its progressive attitude to teaching and the other because of its traditional



approach to teaching through subjects! Cohen and Manion (1980) stress the spectrum of aspects of educational research from the objective, measurable, and consistently interpreted quantitative approach to the subjective, account and situation based qualitative approach which relies so heavily on participant observation and personal constructs. This is partly explained by the complexity of any judgement which will be based on three elements. The first is the detail of the school as an organisation and the way in which this is detailed to those who are interested in its life and work. This is referred to as the ontology of the case study. This is however, complicated by the second factor, epistemology, which attempts to analyse the incomplete knowledge which people have of an institution. Despite the fact that they may believe that they know the school well there may be gaps and inconsistencies in their knowledge which might affect any judgement made. The third factor is that human response to situations will vary according to the viewpoint of the person making any judgement - personal interpretations thus develop. All these underlie any interpretation of the data yielded in case study investigation. This is shown in the way in



which parents referred to the size of the school (an institutional fact), the existence of a well qualified staff (an interpretive comment), and a place where their child would be happy ( a human response to the perceived qualities of the institution). The reasons quoted by out of area parents seeking admission to a school of their choice may arise from their attempt to find a rationale which, they believe, will be most likely to secure success in making their application. This led Young (1971) to distinguish between the normative response which will tend to be objective, and system related, and the interpretive which is what is really meant. This caution must be considered in interpretation of much of the data collected for the case studies used in this research. Access to a small number of the papers from the appeals panels for 1989 in Oxfordshire yields evidence of this in that parents are more open in what they say when they meet the panel. It may be that they feel that confidential comments can be made without the schools involved knowing what has been written as they would do at the stage of submitting preference forms. It is also possible that they do not wish to give real reasons for

choice lest their preference should not be available, or their appeal unsuccessful, in which case they will have to return to the school which was rejected. The issue of subjectivity is considered further in the light of the case study investigations in Chapter Seven.

### The Research Framework

These reservations were implicit in all planning for the two stages of this investigation. The subjectivity of the case study approach is such that generalisations based upon the evidence from a number of schools must be treated with caution.

#### Stage 1. Establishing criteria by which judgements are made. "What makes a good school?"

To secure some degree of objectivity it was first of all, necessary to ascertain the factors considered important in judgements made about any school. What are the criteria which people generally adopt? It is possible that judgement of educational matters will be affected by the respondents' experience of schools. It is also possible that the Hawthorne effect could operate and that respondents would react according to their perceptions of the investigation with which they are

assisting but this is less likely if they have nothing to gain or lose by their response ( Evans, 1978). The problem of perceived meanings remains but it is hoped that the size of the samples involved in all stages of the investigation would allow for some validity in the findings.( Burrell, Morgan, 1979).

Survey details are given in Chapter 4 but the aim of the first part of the investigation was to ascertain those features which are taken into account in judging schools. The empirical work was undertaken at Burford School, Oxfordshire, in 1989 and the aim was to ascertain the most common factors considered by members of the community in judging the success of any school. To ensure that the basis of this was as broad as possible discussions took place with the Parents Advisory Committee and the Students Advisory Committee in this large mixed comprehensive school . From these discussions 41 possible criteria for judgement of a school were evolved. These were to be considered by the community, interpreted in its widest terms to include all those who form part of the school in its environment (Packwood ,1988). In the first stage of the work a balance was sought between numbers of respondents from existing



parents and from the community; the parents being divided into two groups , at entry and at year nine to show something of a any change of view as pupils moved through the school. For the second stage of the research the community was identified as having three stakeholder groups - parents, leavers and the community of the school environment. This was based on the belief that parents on entry would have a picture of the school unaffected by experience unless there had been an older sibling; the leavers would be reflecting upon their experience and would be capable of affecting the views of those seeking their opinion within the environment of the school, and the community, selected according to the criteria given in Appendix 2, who might have no direct association with the school at all. (Murgatroyd, 1989).

After a pilot exercise with a sample of thirty parents the proposed response grid form which listed the 41 possible criteria for judgement was amended, both in the instructions given and in the wording where it was felt that some of the phrases used suffered from being too compressed (Youngman,1982). Respondents were to be asked to rate the listed factors in school success on a



scale of 5 for most important to 0 for unimportant. This form was then circulated to the parents of the complete year groups seven and nine (350 students) and 300 members of the community including 50 leavers at either 16 or 18. An example of the completed form is shown as Appendix 3. Ranking on a 5 - 0 scale of importance was included to allow for eventual analysis of those features which were seen of greatest and least importance to each group of respondents (Cohen and Manion, 1980). These results were then compared with the other surveys detailed in Chapter 2 although these were more limited in that they were predominantly concerned with parents reactions, and with choice of school only. However, from the Burford data and the other research evidence it was possible to identify the twelve most frequently mentioned criteria were selected as the basis of the second stage of the investigation.

Stage 2. Ascertaining the perceived strengths of participant schools. "How good is this school?"

The second part of the investigation was concerned with establishing the strength of each of the identified features in judgements about seven selected schools. The reduction to twelve criteria was to meet the

need for a group of commonly accepted process and product factors which could be quickly assessed by respondents. Some of the criteria do subsume other criteria in the Burford survey e.g. homework policy is seen to be part of work emphasis in the second stage work. A target of ninety community respondents was sought in each school composed of 30 parents of new admissions; 30 leavers, and 30 members of the community including users of the site, local residents, shopkeepers, welfare agencies and governors. It is recognised that the use of a group of leavers, whilst justified on the basis of their contribution to community knowledge or debate about school life, brings problems of interpretation. The leavers are very near to their own school experience and may be basing judgement on this rather than on perceptions generalised from what they know of the school. This constitutes a problem in that some of the data, especially from interviews, is capable of being evidence of perception or an assessment of reality. In the use of the material the writer has again used a trust judgement. Ten responses were sought from staff to provide a further guide to the degree of commonality

between community perceptions and those of a sample who know the school and its policies well.

Although access to the schools was not difficult to negotiate headteachers were anxious that the approach should be as positive as possible and in line with Brighouse (1987) the selected characteristics by which judgements are made of schools were tabulated in such a way that respondents were asked to indicate strengths only. The response form is shown in Appendix 4 and does provide for further comment if this is volunteered. The form is tightly structured and allows for a tabular agreement response as discussed by Tuckman (1972). The failure to list weaknesses was initially seen as a disadvantage for this study but it was noticed that in pilot work with one school the community was anticipating that they should criticise rather than praise and it was recognised that some consideration of positive aspects of the local school would be advantageous for the schools involved - teaching morale would not be helped by an opportunity for local criticism. Interviews and free comment on response forms did provide some evidence of weaknesses in schools. Further discussion of points made by respondents with members of the staff of schools



proved to be more productive if positive strengths were highlighted. Indeed, many of the teaching staff volunteered information on what they considered to be weaknesses of the school which they were less ready to do when adopting a defensive stance if challenged with a school weakness. However, comparison of the two Scottish surveys (Adler, Petch and Tweedie (1989), and S.E.D. (1989), suggests that parents were at ease with either positive or negative viewpoints and were prepared to discuss strengths in those schools chosen as objectively as they discussed weaknesses in those which were rejected. Thus it may be that the sensibilities of the heads of case study schools had been over indulged in planning the enquiry but as two schools were at a critical stage in their development it was preferable to investigate according to the wishes of the school.

The seven selected schools were chosen to be representative of a variety of communities in two shire counties of the south west Midlands. Details are given in Chapter 5 but paired schools, one 11-16 and one 11-18, were involved in each of rural, suburban and urban situations together with one urban 13-18 high



school. The range includes three schools with extensive and dispersed catchment areas and four schools with well-defined socially homogeneous neighbourhood catchment areas. It includes four schools which are in highly competitive enrolment situations but the remaining three are also conscious of the issue of reputation because parts of their catchment areas are nearer other schools and the pressure on parents to look elsewhere is acknowledged. The importance of these social, economic, locational and "competitive" factors is discussed in the investigation of each school. This follows the analytic approach of Vanbergen (1977) in which the unique relationship of the school to its surroundings is seen as fundamental to assessment of effectiveness. He attempts through the analysis of environmental features to show how these affect the way in which a school can be successful. He maintains that community relationships are as important as the detail of the student intake in determining measurable outcomes such as examination results, numbers to further education, attendance and attitude to uniform.

The survey results would, it is hoped, yield information about the collective view of particular

strengths of each school and analysis of component group responses might give some indication of differing perceptions according to the respondents' relationship to the school. This alone would not be sufficient for an understanding of the way in which the parents and community felt about the school, and some further information was necessary to elicit the validity of understanding of the terms used in the survey and some consideration of perceptions of the institution which could not be obtained by other means. A brief second section of the questionnaire elicited previous connections of the respondent or the respondent's family with the school and sought information on the way in which discussions had taken place about characteristics of the school and this was also followed through in interviews. It was planned therefore to interview a further thirty of the community involved with each of the schools and to follow a semi-structured interview technique based on the questions given in Appendix 5. This triangulation (Cohen and Manion (1980) allowed for the collection of further data to clarify attitudes in the complexity of school assessment.

In some interviews there was a strongly subjective element in that interviewees spoke from their own experience in schools which had been the forerunners of present schools which had existed in the same buildings before comprehensive reorganisation. Interpretation was consequently affected by not only what was said but the way in which it was expressed, and the way in which it was clearly related to the social experiences either whilst at the school or subsequently. It also became personal and value laden as interviewees saw an opportunity to detail the experiences which had been the basis for their judgement. This led to some consideration of the ethnographic approach as outlined by Harre (1977). He argues that because of the complexity of the past experience of the respondent, his or her ability to express views, reaction to the interviewer and the circumstances of the interview, caution is needed in the interpretation of what people say. He stresses the subjectivity in a social environment as a caveat before generalisations can be attempted.

Stage 3. Comparison of perceived and actual strengths in each school. "Is this really a good school?"

The third stage of the investigation aimed at



the collection of both objective and qualitative data on each of the features of school climate and organisation which had formed the basis of community judgement of the strengths of each school. A comparison between the perceived qualities of the school and the reality expressed in a variety of sources of information could be the basis of some further understanding of the validity of community opinion. After consideration of the issues of subjectivity as seen by Curtis and Mays (1978) who extend the argument that respondents bring their own agenda to bear in making both objective and opinion based responses it was recognised that the data from the questionnaire and interviews was particular to the social and educational environment of each school and that comparisons of perceived and actual strengths would be uniquely applicable to each school situation. Much of the analysis is, therefore, based on school by school consideration of data. Generalisations are then made on the common findings from the seven schools.

#### Judgement of School Quality

Judgement of school quality involves both qualitative and quantitative criteria. Some of these



criteria may be seen as performance indicators which are increasingly used as part of the monitoring process within schools. An analysis of the performance indicators used in one of the case study schools illustrates objective approaches to the annual publication of examination results, further and higher education placements, attendance rates and, a recent innovation, the overall gain, or loss, of the year nine group Verbal Reasoning Quotient scores compared with those on admission at the start of year seven. These are now being used in an attempt to give some "value added" assessment of the school experience related to the academic and social characteristics of the school intake. The more descriptive indicators have arisen from "markers" in the achievement of educational change consequent upon the introduction of the Technical and Vocational Initiative Extension phase in the school which now provides evidence of the application of whole school policies for students with special needs, information technology awareness and equal opportunities policies within the curriculum.

Fitz-Gibbon (1989) outlined those characteristics which are related to the work of the school in securing improvement given the nature of the intake to the school

using data such as examination results at 16 plus related to reading age on entry to the school. In the same collection of papers Hulme (1989) has used the broader concept of performance evaluation with reference to pupil and parent attitudes to aspects of school organisation, and achievement, as reflected in attendance figures, staying on rates and statistics related to juvenile delinquency. The range of indicators may be couched in accountancy terms as in the monitoring and evaluation advice of Coopers and Lybrand (1988) to the Department of Education and Science in the evolution of a scheme of local management of schools. Objections to such a mechanistic view were recognised in the Guidelines issued by the Department of Education and Science in 1989 in which characteristics of school and classroom environment and experience are also used as descriptors. These factors of experience and environment are used much more subjectively in the consideration of meaningful pupil-teacher relationships, pupil satisfaction with their education and the achievement of above average levels of academic progress for the school by a high proportion of the students as suggested by Gray (1990). A comparison of

SUMMARY OF PERFORMANCE CRITERIA		INDICATORS FOR GIVEN CRITERIA		SUMMIT LEA Buckinghamshire 1987		SURREILLO Gray 1987	
		D.E.S					
Schoolwork emphasis	Staff details	Staff details	Respect/trust	Expected level of attainment	Pupil satisfaction		
Teaching method	Deployment Curriculum documentation Homework Expectations Contact ratios Class sizes Pupil grouping Curriculum arrangements Industry/Community links	Deployment Objectives Homework Extended curriculum Aware of needs Development plan Community links Curriculum organisation	Encouragement All valued equally Positive ethos Orderly atmosphere Wide strategies Negotiation Home learning opportunities Level/space/scope Schemes of work		Pupil satisfaction		
Resource levels/staff/ accommodation/equipment	Teachers/grade Ancillary/grade Parental support Book & library Technical facilities Accommodation level/standards	Teachers/grade Ancillary/grade Age/type/condition Special facilities	Appropriate range Effective deployment Curriculum basis Effective organisations Teacher training with whole school aims				
Teaching help for student	Staff demeanour Staff turnover Staff characteristics	Objectives INSET Relationships	Individual basis of learning Display encouragement Coherent plans Consistent attitudes Assessment and marking Relationships Positive self-image Praise and recognition		Good relationships		
Caring atmosphere	Pastoral system Responsibility Rewards/sanctions Extra curricular activities Local community	Objectives Relationships Initiative/responsibility Self esteem Bullying Community links Performance of entry					
Examination results	Performance  Other attainments	Performance of policy Across time/curriculum Across LEA/national Indications of whole curriculum Standardised tests Expectations Responsibilities Preference Relationships Communications Clear expectations Attendance Vandalism/graffitti Initiative/responsibility Relationships Acceptability	Monitoring		Actual v. expected progress		
Parent contact	Expectations Support	Consultation			Pupil satisfaction		
Explicit school rules	Rewards/sanctions Demeanour Attendance Responsibility Indictable offences Demeanour Expectations Post school performance Entry rates	All post-16 destinations					
Disciplinary standards							
Appearance of pupils							
FE/HE numbers							
Reports	Employment status Academic attainment/phase Performance internal Participation external	Attitudes/R o A use Communications	Record of progress Monitoring R o A used				



performance indicators used in a range of evaluations is given in Fig.2. and this indicates the range of material, and the data collection difficulties and capacity for multiple interpretation by the variety of audiences who might become party to the information. Each of the case study schools has established its own criteria by which each element of the school development plan can be judged following L.E.A. interpretation of Hargreaves et al (1989). Far from giving comparability this has added to the difficulties of making generalisations because each school is starting from a different point in development planning and judges success in terms of movement from that base point.

The way in which these performance indicators are collected, and interpreted, ( or misinterpreted), within the school community is an important factor in reporting on effectiveness and Sanday (1990) cautions against the use of simple descriptors of complex situations . He cites the use of terminology such as "mixed ability approaches" whatever the method of instruction being used, and the current investigation showed a similar variety of understanding of a "caring environment", a term used very frequently in school



prospectuses. Problems exist in interpreting performance indicators within the teaching profession and the individual school. They are likely to be much greater if they arise from interpretation by those outside the system (Louis and Miles (1990)). Even the attempt to quantify agreed factors in school effectiveness and to relate these statistically to outcomes as undertaken by Leithwood, Jantzi and Dart (1991) is fraught with difficulty because of the need to give a ranking to factor components as a basis for calculation. They argue that the effort to give a degree of objectivity is inhibited by reliance on "what people say" about features of school experience and cite the descriptor "motivation for implementation of policy by teachers" , used in one school in their survey, as an essentially judgmental approach.

It was found necessary to draw on a broad range of evaluative material in assessing the strength of each criterion in each school. Some evidence is statistical and can be compared with perceptions in a straightforward way. Percentage of the age cohort gaining five or more higher grade GCSE examination passes can be related to a

community view of good examination results. So too can attendance levels be linked with a view that there are high expectations of pupil behaviour but in evaluating some elements of school effectiveness subjective data may be the only data available because some of the criteria evolved are incapable of firm measurement. Pupil appearance, for example, is judged by some to mean the wearing of school uniform but by others to mean tidy clothing without any school identification. Even this seems capable of varied interpretation where all Charford pupils wear regulation trousers or skirts, blazers and white or grey shirts or blouses and socks but the requirement in Castle school is much more liberal - in both schools there can be said to be full uniform! It is also difficult to gather evidence for "contact with parents" when some parents actually expect more of these contacts than those who are quite happy with a report and a parents' evening once each year as shown by Woolley (1990).

The basis of the individual evidence for achievement in each school is given later in this thesis but the collection of data has been as consistent as possible to allow for consideration of generalisations

from the individual studies. The main objective in data collection was to include evidence of the nature of the intake so that judgements can be related to the local socio-economic environment; evidence of the educational process including curriculum arrangements, teaching methods and pastoral organisation, and detail of those outcomes which are relevant to the criteria under review. In gaining much of this information reliance was placed on discussions with staff, with pupils in the school and in the observed daily and termly pattern of life as outlined in the reports on each school (Deal and Peterson, 1990). Much also depended on the interpretation of a variety of documentary evidence which was seen by members of the community as one of the ways in which the school presented itself. One comment was,

"tatty posters don't attract and it looks as if they haven't much pride in what they expect." Shopkeeper, Albert School area

"it isn't the glossy brochure - its rather what it says that counts." Parent Holmleigh School.

Clearly, school policy may be helped by both the knowledge of such comments and by some understanding of



Figure 3. Descriptors used in each school to assess the strength of given criteria.

Work emphasis	Brochures and stated policies Homework emphasis and system Classwork routine consistent throughout Rewards and sanctions for work
Teaching methods	Whole school policies and programmes of work Differentiation strategies throughout Planned curricular coherence Assessment and recording of progress
Special facilities	Library availability and use for all students Specialist accom. for subject teaching Information Technology availability and use Allocation of finance according to devt.plan
Teaching staff help	Referral for learning difficulties Study skills support for all students Subject staff availability for individuals Staff-pupil relationships; policy and evidence
Caring atmosphere	Guidance referral system and use Tutorial education policy and values Activities programme and take-up Pupil-pupil relationships as policy
Reports on pupils	Annual procedures understood by staff Formative-summative linkage Pupil negotiation element Public awareness of systems
Parental contact	Systems developed and understood by staff Language of communications Information type and frequency Consultation opportunities
Clear rules	Code of conduct policies Pupil awareness of these Staff consistency in application Enforcement support
Behaviour and expectations	Class behaviour standards Around school, movement and attitudes Out of school responsibility taken by school Shared values teaching e.g. through assemblies
Numbers to further ed.	Annual statistics discussed by staff Tutorial development of positive attitudes Careers and guidance objectives Follow-on support systems
Examination results	Use of GCSE pass rates overall for discussion Use of GCSE A-C for discussion Improvement on entry VRQ or similar A level pass rates related to GCSE
Appearance	Uniform policy agreed and known Enforcement support Stress on personal appearance as a value Policy on adornments known and followed



the way in which other people see their documentation. Presentation of a whole school picture as well as of the data relevant to the criteria under consideration by the community is thus seen to be of importance. (Burgess (1985)). For the purposes of this work it was, however, essential that the same group of criteria were considered for each school involved but the sources of evidence for comparison of what the community believes to be a strength, and what is shown to be a strength from available evidence, may vary from school to school. In the search for this evidence in each school reference was made to all the performance indicators listed in Fig. 2 and four component features or descriptors, arising from discussion with the advisory service for one of the two counties concerned, were then linked to each of the strengths adopted as criteria to be used on the response form for each case study school (see p.136-7). These are presented as Fig. 3. These descriptors for each of the twelve criteria for judgement were then considered for each school. Documentary evidence and interview discussion was used to ascertain the existence of each descriptor in each school. It was possible for each criteria to have a maximum of four descriptors - the

actual number being recorded as part of the summary table for each case study. In this way there was some degree of consistency between evaluation of the same strength as a reality in each school. It is recognised, however, that another researcher might use an altogether different set of descriptors or assess their presence or absence differently.

#### An approach to analysis

Although it is relatively easy to match a community view of a strength with the evidence available for the reality of that strength within a school there are major problems in attempting any precise measurement of either the degree of concordance between the two or any statistical link which makes it possible to compare the extent of accurate community awareness in one school with that which pertains in another. In short there is a need for some measure of objectivity in analysis.

Rutter (1977) developed a multiple regression analysis which attempted to relate outcomes, all of which were measurable, to the intake and process characteristics of each school. His team defined the contents of the empirical grouped evidence they were

collecting using data such as age of building, number of sites, as constituents of the physical and administrative features of the schools, and the existence of form duties and emphasis on the care of resources as part of the atmosphere of pupil participation. By removing those grouped factors which appeared to have little influence on outcomes it was possible to isolate those which were of major importance. In this way they were able to relate outcomes to the process features which characterised each school (Ouston and Maughan (1985)). Madaus, Airasion and Kellaghan (1980) considered the advantages and disadvantages of attempting to ascribe statistical measures to such process features and stress that although there may be a high degree of commonality in one set of process factors and one or other outcomes the findings cannot automatically be causal and findings must be interpreted in the light of the subjective issues already discussed.

This investigation does not seek to demonstrate any element of causality. The fact that a large proportion of respondents believes a school to have high pupil expectations may be matched by evidence which demonstrates that high expectations exist but there is no



assumption that high expectations exist because the community believe it to be so. Philosophical considerations of the nature of individual and group perceptions, as discussed by Gray (1988), suggest that such causality cannot be objective because individuals within the organisation have their own ideas of cause and effect. This point is addressed further in Chapter 7 in the light of case study findings. The purpose of any statistical measurement in the present study is to ascertain how far a perceived strength is an actual strength according to the performance indicators which are selected. It is possible that there will be a varying number of respondents who see each criterion as a strength and ranking of strengths would thus be a possibility but this would be of limited value because there is no possibility of ranking achievement according to performance indicators which are looking at differing features of school life. High expectations may be seen to be a stronger element of the school than a caring atmosphere but there is no homogeneity of data to ascribe values to each as features of a hierarchy of school strengths. (Burgess, 1985).



Survey data can be presented in a way which reflects the percentage of responses in each group of respondents who see a feature as a strength of the school. Against this, corroborative evidence can be collected from the school, but because this is qualitative, it can only indicate the relative strength or weakness. However, it is possible to assess comparatively the degree of "match" between perceived strength measured in responses and backed by interview data, and the comparative strength or weakness of the same feature according to the available performance indicator evidence. No attempt has been made to evaluate the degree of match for each criterion with each group of respondents but the case study reports give some comment upon the nature of perceptions related to any evidence which might be indicative of match, the objective performance indicators as far as these are available, and then an attempt at assessment of the overall community perception of the school compared with a comment upon the reality as experienced by the writer. The tables summarise the quantitative data available for each school including the responses from the stakeholder groups, staff responses which have been used to provide

some further evidence of reality, the number of descriptors recognised for each criterion, and an analysis of the way in which discussion about the school might be related to social networks.

#### Implications for policy

Analysis of the match between believed and actual strengths of a school may have implications for policy not only in the school under review but also in the relationship of that school to neighbouring schools as investigated by Dennison (1990). The questionnaire data may indicate the general level of community support for a school measured in terms of positive responses per return submitted, a low number of perceived strengths indicating that the school is either unsuccessful, and therefore seen to have few strengths, or is unsuccessful in managing its external environment. Some may not have responded to one or more particular criteria because of lack of knowledge but that might also indicate the need for increased local awareness of what the school can offer. Considerations of community links, the management of reputation and a concern for the factors affecting enrolment may all be illustrated by the investigation.

Awareness that it might be important is reflected in the work of Hannaford (1990) in one Medway school, and in work by Doubleday (1990) in Oxford City - in both cases the investigation was undertaken to increase staff awareness of the need to manage the relationship of the school to its environment.

The degree of correspondence between the community responses and the strengths as seen by the 10 staff respondents in each school may also have policy implications in that there might be some divergence between the policies seen as strengths by the staff and the way in which these are seen as a weakness by the community which might have a more traditional viewpoint. Such issues have been addressed by Sayer and Williams (1989) and Lawton (1989) in presenting the issues which face the school in meeting the demands of the community in a competitive environment. The extent to which the shared values of the staff are understood by both the staff and the community was one of the aims of the interviews in the current work and forms part of the commentary on each school.

Macbeth (1989) has investigated the policy implications of recent legislation by considering the



nature of "weak" and "strong" choice related to the socio-economic environment and the aspirations of the community involved. He has stressed that equality of choice is conditioned by the availability of free transport, the availability of a diversity of provision, and the ability of schools to respond to the demand for places. These issues have been investigated in the current research and affect the degree of responsiveness of the school. Albert School recognises that it is "bottom of the local pecking order" and that it must respond immediately to community comment; Castle because of its geographical isolation, limited competition and stable numbers appears less concerned about mismatch between school and community perceptions and is slow to react to local opinion. Vulnerability is thus a factor in local policy for the management of reputation. Consumerism is investigated in individual interviews and the ready co-operation of heads in the collection of data reflects an increased awareness of the school in its relationship to its environment.

#### The Case Study Data

The uniqueness of the relationship between



the school and its community is such that each case study investigation is given as an analysis which sets out the local educational environment, considers the socio-economic and "intake" data, and deals with the general features of organisation and philosophy as background material. An analysis of responses is then given. This shows the process and product factors as strengths of schools separately. The product factors include the outcomes of numbers to further and higher education and examination results, both of which have some statistical objectivity, and pupil appearance, which appears to be so important in the local communities as an expression of the ethos of the school. Whether it is a process or product factor is arguable but all the interview evidence suggests that it is seen as an outcome. The recorded strengths are then matched with evidence which supports or questions the feature under consideration as a strength of the school. The number of high and low correlations is then presented as evidence of the extent of "match" between perception and reality. Commentary on these findings is drawn from the interview material. Generalisations about the way in which the "grapevine" develops and can be managed has implications for the

nature of home school links, the development of community education in its broadest sense, and the responsiveness of the school to its local environment.

#### Conclusion

The methods used in these investigations were developed to provide data which might enhance understanding of the way in which communities think about their local schools and the implications this might have for the individual school and the educational system in an area. Evaluation of methodology developed at each stage of the investigation was noted and is presented in Chapter 7 as part of the conclusion to this thesis. It was however, realised at an early stage that concentration upon schools known to the writer may have enhanced the readiness of respondents to discuss issues which arose. The possible loss from this strategy has been that the sample of case study schools does not include either one with extreme deprivation or one which, in the eyes of the community, is judged to be unsuccessful. In the same way the use of Burford School for the initial investigation was valuable in that there was a high degree of response from those who were asked to say how they judged school success but the results may well have been too markedly skewed because of the social environment.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE CRITERIA USED BY PARENTS AND COMMUNITY IN JUDGING SCHOOL QUALITY

Most of the investigations detailed in Chapter 2 were concerned with ascertaining the basis of parental choice of school. They do not differentiate between reasons for choice and the actual judgement about a school. Elliott, (1981), although seeking to ask how parents judged schools, actually investigated the factors in the choice of one particular school. Adler, Petch and Tweedie, (1989) also investigated the reasons for choice of school and stress the pragmatic and personal factors in this process. The Scottish Education Department survey (1989) alone in the major investigations posed the specific question of judgement of schools and endeavoured to move away from the choice factors which contain elements of judgement. Hunter (1991), West and Varlaam, (1991) and Coldron and Boulton (1991) all return to the complexities of the motivation of parents in the choice of schools noting the importance of school proximity, pupil happiness and the availability of single-sex or

church education.

The researchers listed above have attempted to differentiate between the product or outcomes of schools, and the process of school experience for the students involved. This distinction is of value in the current investigation because there might be some relationship between the type and ethos of particular schools and the factors used by their communities in reaching judgements about success. If there is a discernible relationship this might have implications for the management of the external environment of the school.

The first stage of the current investigation was aimed at finding those factors which members of a school community considered to be important in making judgements about a school. Comparison of these findings with those from other research might provide the basis of a set of criteria upon which communities could make judgements of school strengths for the case study schools. The evidence of stated strengths from one set of school responses alone could not be used as the basis for judgement. It had to be supported by evidence from other sources.



Burford School, Oxfordshire Investigation 1989

The initial investigation of the way in which parents and community judge the quality of schooling arose from a complex of school needs. There was a wish on the part of Governors to extend the school self evaluation process towards the client groups and to seek reaction of these to established school policies at Burford School. The exercise was also seen to be of value in assessing the impact of ten years of community education development by providing some evidence of the way in which the increasing numbers using the facilities of school and site were aware of the culture and practice of the school. It was also hoped to ascertain some of the factors in judgement of schools in the hope that it might be possible to influence the basis of choice exercised by parents from the Carterton School catchment area so that the two schools concerned might undertake more co-operative ventures in an effort to counter the mythology which was leading to a disturbing imbalance in intakes. Information on the way in which the culture of the school was understood by parents and community was also believed

to be essential before there could be further consideration of the management of open enrolment policies arising from the Education Act 1988. The background to the development of the School has already been outlined in Chapter 1. About one third of the total students came from outside the catchment area at the time of the investigation in 1989 and a parallel study of the effects of parent pressure groups and their involvement in formulating school policy in three schools (Glover, unpublished) shows that the out of area group do play a more than proportionate part in parental activities and in policy discussions and one of the tasks of the investigation was to see whether this was leading to excessively traditional expectations with a risk that these might be fulfilled at the cost of educational development in the open enrolment situation.

It was realised from the start that the remarkable staff stability (less than 2% turnover in the previous seven years) and the high level of family association with the School, (40% of the students came from second or third generation attenders at the School),

might give an inherent conservatism . The results might be unique to one school and community and this led to the investigation of comparable studies detailed later in this chapter before establishing a definitive list of criteria acceptable as a basis for judgement of school strengths. The pilot investigation with a group of thirty parents showed some concern that there should be an attempt to group the 41 "qualities" which had resulted from the brainstorming sessions with parents and students so that there was some organisational plan about the questionnaire to be used. Consideration was also given to the semantics so that there was agreement amongst the pilot participants about the meaning of the necessarily abbreviated terms used. The pilot group also spent time discussing reaction to the 5 - 0 response scale and the value attaching to contiguous grades and the possibility that "one person's 3 would be another person's 2 "was discussed at length.

There was some wish to obtain a longitudinal view of change in attitudes over a period of time and to meet this response was sought from parents at entry to the school (98 respondents), parents of year nine after

their children had been in the school for at least two years (93 respondents), and members of the community including former students, parents of former students, community activity members of the school, local residents in four of the village areas, and sixth formers who had come to the school from other catchment areas (198 respondents). The small number of individual participants in each group of the community respondents is not statistically significant but was of value to the school in indicating attitudes within the local environment, showing, for example, a high importance ascribed in one village area to pupil demeanour where there had been complaints about "waiting in the bus shelter".

The balance between numbers of parental and community responses suggested that the multiple aims of the research could be achieved without undue distortion. Triangulation was provided by follow up interviews with two parents in each of years seven and nine and four members of the community group. These were to ensure that their responses were being interpreted correctly. Their main concern was that the grades ascribed to each



Table 1. Percentage response for "highly important" and (important) of the listed criteria with ranking of twenty most significant for each group of respondents.

Criterion	Entry parents %	Rank	Leavers %	Rank	Community %	Rank
WORK CULTURE						
Work emphasis	95	1	90	5	85	3
Homework	66		77		(66)	16
Teaching method	90	5	87	10	86	2
Class setting	67		75	20	(58)	
Length of day			(53)		(46)	
Work displays	(76)		(71)		(52)	
EXTRA-MURAL ACTIVITIES						
Sports activity	(65)		65		58	14
Music & Drama	74		71		57	15
House activity	(65)		(72)		(50)	
Year activity			(72)		(58)	
CURRICULUM ARRANGEMENTS						
Languages policy	68		69		(51)	
Latin option						
Science courses	65		74		(59)	
Specialist rooms	73	18	78	16	(59)	
Library	79	15	70	17	(54)	
IT availability	73	18	73		(56)	
SUPPORT FOR PUPILS						
Subject help	95	1	94	2	78	4
Form tutor help	85	8	89	9	65	12
Year head help	66		76	19	(59)	
Deputy head help	(55)		60		(49)	
Head help	51		58		(51)	
SCHOOL CULTURE						
Social educn.	(73)		(69)		(52)	
Assemblies						
Known rules	79	15	90	5	69	9
Discipline	95	1	99	1	66	10
"Rewards"	84	9	80	15	(47)	
Uniform	75	17	77	17	51	17
Pupil appearance	84	9	85	11	77	6
Building state	72	20	69		66	10
Pupil demeanour	88	7	90	5	(65)	17
Staff demeanour	90	5	93	3	70	8
Tradition	(65)		(66)		(47)	
Brochures			(47)			
OUTCOMES						
Exam results	84	9	93	3	88	1
Yearly reports	82	13	90	5	63	13
Leaving reports	82	13	81	13	78	4
Employment	(57)		55		(63)	18
Higher education	91	4	84	12	77	6
SCHOOL SUPPORT						
Parent/staff mtgs	83	12	81	14	(60)	
Parents Assocn	(72)		(68)			
Community College	(68)		(78)		(60)	

criterion would be consistent; there was no concern about the meaning of the listed criteria which appeared to be readily understood in the school context.

The percentage of respondents identifying each quality or feature on a grade scale from 5 - 0 was noted. To overcome the problems of differentiation between grades the two adjacent highest values were aggregated and the results tabulated with grades 4/5 classified as high importance and 3/4 as important. The twenty most significant responses for each group of respondents was also ranked. The results are given in Table 1. Whilst the investigation concentrated on "important" criteria there was also significance in the "unimportant" element in choice and for this reason those factors which scored an aggregate of above 10% with values 0 or 1 for each group of respondents have been recorded in Table 2. Table 3 gives the cumulative percentage and ranking for the "highly important" criteria when all respondents are added . When this is done the effect is that the somewhat lower ratings given by community respondents are balanced by the greater significance of school process factors as rated by

Table 2. Percentage response for "highly important" and (important) of the listed criteria with ranking of twenty most significant for each group of respondents.

Criterion	Entry parents %	Rank	Leavers %	Rank	Community %	Rank
WORK CULTURE						
Work emphasis	95	1	90	5	85	3
Homework	66		77		(66)	16
Teaching method	90	5	87	10	86	2
Class setting	67		75	20	(58)	
Length of day			(53)		(46)	
Work displays	(76)		(71)		(52)	
EXTRA-MURAL ACTIVITIES						
Sports activity	(65)		65		58	14
Music & Drama	74		71		57	15
House activity	(65)		(72)		(50)	
Year activity			(72)		(58)	
CURRICULUM ARRANGEMENTS						
Languages policy	68		69		(51)	
Latin option						
Science courses	65		74		(59)	
Specialist rooms	73	18	78	16	(59)	
Library	79	15	70	17	(54)	
IT availability	73	18	73		(56)	
SUPPORT FOR PUPILS						
Subject help	95	1	94	2	78	4
Form tutor help	85	8	89	9	65	12
Year head help	66		76	19	(59)	
Deputy head help	(55)		60		(49)	
Head help	51		58		(51)	
SCHOOL CULTURE						
Social educn.	(73)		(69)		(52)	
Assemblies						
Known rules	79	15	90	5	69	9
Discipline	95	1	99	1	66	10
"Rewards"	84	9	80	15	(47)	
Uniform	75	17	77	17	51	17
Pupil appearance	84	9	85	11	77	6
Building state	72	20	69		66	10
Pupil demeanour	88	7	90	5	(65)	17
Staff demeanour	90	5	93	3	70	8
Tradition	(65)		(66)		(47)	
Brochures			(47)			
OUTCOMES						
Exam results	84	9	93	3	88	1
Yearly reports	82	13	90	5	63	13
Leaving reports	82	13	81	13	78	4
Employment	(57)		55		(63)	18
Higher education	91	4	84	12	77	6
SCHOOL SUPPORT						
Parent/staff mtgs	83	12	81	14	(60)	
Parents Assocn	(72)		(68)			
Community College	(68)		(78)		(60)	

parents. This is seen in that the rating for specialist accommodation and facilities, and for a system of rewards as part of school culture, is increased whilst that for employment statistics, although ranked 18th. by the community element is not in the higher ranked features. Overall, the cumulative data provides the material upon which the eventual list of criteria was based. Individual returns could give something of a profile of the respondent but this has not been pursued in the present study because it was most important to ensure anonymity for those taking part. Nevertheless there is evidence that the philosophical stance and past experience of a respondent may be reflected in the selection of criteria considered to be important, closely mirroring Johnson (1987) in her findings on the rationale for parental choice of type of school.

The community responses showed a tendency to use the full range of values rather more than those from both groups of parents and it may be that this reflects the closer involvement of the latter who were much more intense in their consideration of what makes a good



Table 3. Cumulative "highly important" percentage responses and ranking for items over 67% response in Burford investigation.

Criterion	%age "highly important"	Rank
WORK CULTURE		
Work emphasis	90	1
Homework	69	15
Teaching method	88	3
Class setting	66	
Length of day	41	
Work displays	54	
EXTRA-MURAL ACTIVITIES		
Sports activities	62	
Music & Drama	67	20
House activities	41	
Year activities	39	
CURRICULUM ARRANGEMENTS		
Languages policy	59	
Latin option	18	
Science courses	63	
Specialist rooms	69	15
Library	65	
IT availability	62	
SUPPORT FOR PUPILS		
Subject help	89	2
Form tutor help	80	10
Year head help	67	20
Deputy head help	48	
Head help	52	
SCHOOL CULTURE		
Social education	56	
Assemblies	22	
Known rules	79	12
Discipline	87	5
"Rewards"	69	15
Uniform	68	19
Pupil appearance	82	8
Building state	69	15
Pupil demeanour	81	9
Staff demeanour	84	6
Tradition	47	
Brochures	25	
OUTCOMES		
Exam results	88	3
Yearly reports	78	13
Leaving reports	80	10
Employment	51	
Higher education	84	6
SCHOOL SUPPORT		
Parent/staff meetings	72	14
Parents Association	38	
Community College links	52	

school. It may also be that the community responses were more dispassionate and based on "education" rather than the school. The result of this is that the ranking for parental responses is all from the "highly important" listing but for the community the ranking extends into the "important" category. It is also clear that the community response gives far more items as unimportant and this may be a reflection the view expressed by one of the interviewees in this group "It's what you get out of it all at the end of the day that counts-----the rest is mostly trappings!"

Arising from the preliminary discussions there had been a view that work culture was important to all potential users of the school and this was confirmed by the high ranking of work emphasis for all respondents. Homework does not score as highly although it increases in importance in the year nine response and it ranks 16th. in the community listing. Teaching method is however, accorded importance by all three groups and this may be a local feature because of considerable concern at the mythology of so-called "progressive" education in the

neighbouring schools. With a mixed ability first year less importance attaches to class setting but it is seen as more important by parents at the end of year nine. This item is not given any prominence by the community respondents. Length of school day had been a local issue but did not appear to influence judgement about a school. Neither did the existence of displays of work despite considerable attention given to this in the school together with open evenings for potential students.

"Wholeness of education" had been part of the educational philosophy linked into the Community College activities programme. Year nine parents see sporting activity as of importance but this was not given such a rating by the parents at entry and this may be due to the "fear" of rugby and hockey as sports to primary school leavers. Music and drama retains an importance throughout and it may be with hindsight and drawing on their own experience that the community group respond with much higher rankings for these aspects of school life. Year and house activities are more readily appreciated after time in the school but not so on admission or by the

community at large many of whom knew whole school activities when the roll was 180! The high number of unimportant values given to house activities by this group may confirm this.

Similar reasoning may have affected community response to curriculum arrangements because all criteria listed were only rated as important rather than highly important but this may have been because the current debates are only marginally understood. For parents at entry and in Year Nine the availability of three modern languages and three separate sciences had some importance but despite the frequent use of the phrase "because of Latin" on application forms for the school the reality is that it is not seen as influential in any judgement of the school. Specialist rooms, Library facilities and Information Technology availability are important to parents. This may be related to concepts of a forward looking curriculum in the "big" school but does build on the groundwork in methodology at primary level. The Year Nine students had been members of the school during a period of rebuilding and refurbishment and this may have



increased the importance of this factor to them.

Whatever the curriculum it is clear that support for pupils is regarded as important with high ranking for subject and form staff help with all respondents. The year head concept is understood by parents and increasingly valued as shown in the Year Nine response. It is suggested that although the support from Head and Deputy were considered important in discussion beforehand the inclusion of them in this section limited the consideration of leadership functions which might have been differently valued as part of a school culture section.

Much of the myth surrounding the qualities of any school is related to "the way we do things here" (Deal 1985) and for this reason it is possible that many of the community responses may have been based on limited knowledge. Personal, social and values education were seen to be fundamental to the way in which the school ethos develops and the arrangement of items in this section owes much to Rutter (1979), and to Reid, Hopkins and Holly (1987) in their work on effective schools.

Parents and community alike attach little importance to the "taught" element in this and there is food for thought in the 13% parent and 33% community view of assemblies as unimportant in judging a school. Considerable importance is attached to known rules as a basis for discipline with both sets of parents ranking this as the most important element. There is a relative decline in the importance attached to a rewards system between parents on entry and those who have had experience of the school system but the feature is given an even lower rating by the community respondents, one of whom in interview said that the school had "gone soft". All sections rate uniform such that it ranks 17th. but it may be that the inclusion of a pupil appearance item following discussion at a P.T.A. meeting and a Governors' Meeting of the relationship between uniform and the way it is interpreted led to appearance being seen as of greater significance. The community respondents rank this highest of the school culture features and it is possible that this may have been heightened by the relative freedom allowed to sixth formers in movement in the village where their tendency to "stretch" uniform

regulations is most criticised. Pupil demeanour was seen as a separate issue and becomes of greater importance to parents than to the community respondents for many of whom it was a "taken for granted" feature of school ethos. Staff demeanour ranks highly for all sections reflecting the awareness of the lives of staff, 80% of whom lived in the local area. The state of the buildings is highly rated by all three groups and particularly so by the community who may be influenced by the encouragement they receive to use the facilities. Surprisingly for a school founded in 1571 tradition counts for little in parent or community judgement of the institution and still less weight is given to the brochures by which a school can become known in its locality with 38% of community responses seeing this as unimportant.

It is clear that the "trappings" are not highly rated and the importance attaching to outcomes demonstrates that results are still seen to be amongst the most important criteria for evaluation. Examination results become more important by Year 9 and they are the

most significant factor for the community who also recognise the value of leaving reports, possibly because of much local media coverage of records of achievement designed to be acceptable to employers. Although highly important to all sections the Year Nine parents rate these more highly than on admission and they also regard employment statistics as more significant reflecting interest in appropriate goals for students. On admission and then in the eyes of the community, higher education placements are regarded as highly important indicators.

Support for the school was regarded in discussion as being a clue to the way in which the local area felt and this certainly was an expectation of parents considering their meetings with staff. This could be seen as more related to the individual pupil because the value given to Parent Teacher Association activities is comparatively low and seen as unimportant by 18% of the community. The Community College was recognised as a factor in the life of the school but not seen as ranking highly particularly to those not intimately connected with the school.



The differences between each group of respondents are explicable in terms of the stage at which pupils have reached in their education and the knowledge which respondents have of the practices of the organisation. This is reflected in the judgement of strengths in the case study schools where experience and knowledge of the institution affect the degree of accurate match between judgement and reality but it is possible that the community may judge according to their own experience of schooling and the individual profiles of some respondents reflect this. The community would therefore judge according to exam results, teaching method and pupil support, work emphasis, leaving reports and higher education placement because these are the values by which they were judged whilst at school. There is a tendency for these features to be more product orientated. For the parents judging the school on admission work emphasis, subject help, and discipline are all equally highly rated by 95% of the respondents with higher education placements and staff demeanour as close followers. After two years of the school experience discipline, subject help, staff demeanour and work

emphasis are still amongst the most important factors but exam results, yearly reports and pupil demeanour are more highly regarded. This suggests that although the process factors are significant parents are concerned for outcomes as the student progresses up the school.

This part of the investigation set out to find the criteria by which parents and community judge a school. Because of the comparatively small size of the sample from one school environment this is of limited validity and whilst it is tempting to analyse individual responses in the light of personal knowledge of the respondents, a possibility given the relationship between researcher and the group concerned, this would have limited value for the present purposes. Examination of the returns does however, indicate the recurrence of patterns which might loosely be described as "formal" compared with "pupil centred" in the linkage of high values ascribed to certain groups of criteria. On admission one return rates all factors at the highest level with a comment "that is why I chose the School"; several show "traditional values" in rating work

emphasis, homework, discipline, sporting activities, Latin, uniform and tradition as all highly important and this is mirrored by several of the community responses from those who had known the school in the 1950's. Overall, the responses from those who had come to the school at sixth form level gave a low ranking to all items of school culture and extra-mural activities but showed a high regard for all outcomes. In short, the material reveals as much about the individual respondents as it does about their contribution to an assessment of the criteria by which a school is judged. It is also clear that despite every effort to encourage responses on the grounds of criteria for judging the quality of any school many were looking only at the school they knew as shown in both response profiles and individual comment.

#### Other School Based Investigations

Many schools have undertaken some form of parent and community survey as a basis of policy development in meeting the open enrolment requirements of the 1988 Act. Four of these illustrate the variety of approaches in differing situations but all reveal a

remarkable degree of conformity with the findings described above. Doubleday (1990) distributed 1,500 questionnaires to existing and potential parents, community users, local community, and employers throughout the area served by Matthew Arnold School in the suburban fringe area of Oxford City. There was a 33% response which investigated the basis of school perception - including length of time that the respondent had known the school, previous family association with the school, and the relative importance of factors such as hearsay, proximity and prior visits to the school as a basis of knowledge. The respondents were asked to give reasons for good and bad impression and the strengths were shown to be judged according to the quality of teaching, good standards of behaviour, care and support for pupils, good reports of the school and community involvement. The negative aspects - smoking, untidiness, bad language and lack of achievement by low or middle ability students reflects the negative aspect of the same criteria at work. The investigation also looked at employers perceptions of the work qualities of ex-students and at the impression of the premises gained by



visitors and users with recommendations for strategies which might lead to greater understanding by both sections of the larger community. Reasons for choosing the school were canvassed together with the question to former families "would you choose the school again". The data here once again shows the significance of hearsay (10%) to choosers and this is backed by evidence of pupil happiness, progress and subsequently good exam results. In asking what was liked best about the school further evidence of the judgmental factors was obtained - caring and helpful staff, facilities and opportunities, standards, academic records, examination results and community links are all mentioned. The open comment section of the questionnaire elicited further evidence of concern in these areas of school experience and a telling comment for those responsible for "reputation management",

"Please will those who work at the school stop running it down and sing its and their own praises more often!"

In another report issued in 1990, the Marches School, Oswestry, Shropshire sought to find the reasons

for parental satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the school. In doing so they guided parental response by seeking to know about work emphasis, the influence of teaching methods, the importance of voluntary activities, standards of behaviour and the school response to problems. They also explored the efficacy of communication and ease of contact with the school. In general the responses of 125 parents followed a bell shaped curve between the extremes of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with 55 -65 % being satisfied under each heading. For the current investigation the Marches report has value in that the staff responsible for the questionnaire had made assumptions about the factors which parents would take into account. They did not however, deal with outcomes but concentrated rather more on educational process.

Hanford (1989) obtained responses from some 300 parents in a Medway secondary modern school in an attempt to ascertain those factors considered to be important in the promotion of school image. Outcomes are clearly seen as the greatest factor with emphasis on work ethos, teaching method, examination results and higher education

take-up seen as the most important group of concerns. Help for pupils, both by subject and form staff and quality reports are the second group of attributes with facilities, equipment and the state of the building as a third group. Discipline, known rules, appearance and demeanour are a fourth group but it may be that this ranking is related to the "taken for granted element" in a single sex school which already has a high local reputation. If the secondary modern school is to survive in the competitive situation then the academic issues may well become more important to the parents concerned. There is again though, a similarity in the factors considered important between this, and earlier investigations.

Dene Magna School, at the end of its first four year period as a newly organised comprehensive school in the Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire, used a similar approach to the Burford investigation by asking "what makes a good school?". However, the prompts were open ended so that no values were ascribed to individual qualities, their comparative importance being based on a

record of the number of times each criterion was mentioned. Once again, though, the unpublished report (Dene Magna School, Gloucester (1990)) with 118 responses stresses the importance of work qualities and processes; subject and pastoral help for students; emphasis on issues of discipline and adherence to clear school rules and recognition of features of parental contact and partnership. Specific outcomes are rarely mentioned but are implied in the importance attached to achieving the potential of each individual, instilling a pride in work and relationships and in the role of governors in ensuring high academic standards.

The similarity in the criteria used by parents and community in four different schools with very different social and cultural contexts helps in establishing a list of features which might be seen as important in the creation of a "good school". The nature of the questions asked varies with interchangeability between image, reputation, good school qualities, and reasons for choice. Before determining a final list as the basis of work in each of the seven schools in the present investigation the larger scale recent research



Figure 4. Criteria Deemed Important by Respondents in Preference Surveys 1980 - 1990

Source	Criteria
Elliott, 1981	1. Personal and social development at least as important as academic development
	2. Children are happy and enjoy their lessons
Inner London Education Authority 1986	1. Child's wishes
	2. Accessibility
	3. Facilities
	4. Good behaviour
	5. Well organised school
	6. Examination results
Stillman and Maychell, 1986	1. Examination results and record
	2. Good discipline
	3. Pupil happiness
	4. Accessibility
Adler, Petch, Tweedie, 1989	1. Pupil happiness
	2. Pupil preference
	3. Discipline standards
	4. Accessibility
	5. Siblings or friends attend
MacBeth, Scottish Office, 1989	1. Discipline
	2. Accessibility
	3. Good teaching
	4. Reputation
	5. Pupil-teacher relationships
Hunter, 1991	1. Discipline
	2. Examination results
	3. Single sex
	4. Accessibility

data was also checked. Fig.4 summarises the most important criteria used in the investigations mentioned so far in this thesis.

Consideration of the most important features in all the above surveys led to the determination of the list of criteria shown in Fig.5 by which the stakeholder groups associated with each case study school, would be asked to judge school strengths. This is linked to the previous discussion of possible descriptors on p.104. It will be realised that this does not include the elements of leadership, staff commitment and consistency, shared values and expectation detailed in Rutter (1979), and developed in much of the school effectiveness literature (Reid, Hopkins and Holly (1987), Mortimore, (1988) , Reynolds (1991)) but it does represent the factors as perceived by respondents who were asked to give their views of the characteristics of good schooling rather than reasons for its existence. The school effectiveness evidence has however, been taken into account in seeking those features which provide evidence for the reality of the strengths of the school as discussed in Chapter 3.

Figure 5. Criteria Selected for Respondents to Judge the Strengths of Case Study Schools

Process Factors

Emphasis on work in documents, publicity, statements  
Teaching methods including groupings and approaches  
Special facilities - accommodation, library, I.T.  
Teaching staff help both in and out of class  
Caring approach through tutorial and other support  
Reporting systems used for the students  
Parental contact - meetings, interviews, letters  
Clear rules with written and understood policies  
Behavioural expectations in and out of school

Product Factors

Numbers to further and higher education  
Examination results allowing for intake details  
Pupil appearance in and out of school

There are problems in abstracting a set of criteria from one investigation based on one school and its environment in order to use these in another investigation; there must be an inevitable loss of detail in responsiveness when moving from 41 criteria down to the 12 used in the case study schools. The findings of other investigations offer support for the final selection of criteria but it may be that much would have been gained by using the original criteria in a smaller number of case study schools.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### CASE STUDY FINDINGS

Having established the most significant criteria by which a cross section of parents, leavers and the community would judge schools, a rapid completion questionnaire was circulated to thirty of each group in seven secondary schools. The form asked for a tick to be placed beside those qualities considered to be a strength of the school. Ten members of staff in each school were also asked to complete the questionnaire so that there was some comparison between their views of strengths of the school and the views of those involved in other ways. The staff, usually involved in policy making for the schools, were a reliable source of evidence of practice and philosophy within the schools. Up to thirty people concerned with each school either as parents, leavers or the community were also interviewed. The writer was also involved with these schools as part of another project on school effectiveness and evidence of practice from documentation and staff interviews has also been used in these findings. This evidence was collected in two day

visits to each school each term over a two year period. As explained in Chapter One there is difficulty in defining the constituent groups of parents, leavers and members of the community served by each school. In the presentation of findings the parents are defined as those at the point of their child's entry to the school, usually year 7; the leavers are from year 11 in 11 - 16 schools but equally divided between year 11, year 12 and year 13 in 11 -18 and 13 - 18 schools, and the community included users of the premises, local residents, shopkeepers and agencies including police and medical services. Where the three groups are considered as an entity reference is made to the "stakeholders" of a school indicative of all sections of the community associated with the school as students, staff, governors and members of the public.

Whilst there is some value in aggregating the results from the constituent groups into a total response; "it gives us a quick guide to the public view of the school" (Head, Albert School), the group responses are more readily related to their experience of the

school and can be compared with interview data from other members of the group. Staff survey data is not included in aggregates because they are "inside" the organisation. The figures are included for completeness in each table but do not form a substantial part of the analysis.

The survey data gives an indication of the perceived strengths of each school. In Chapter Six the implications of stakeholders' opinions on school choice are demonstrated and discussed further. The difficulty of matching perceptions and evidence of the reality of each strength within the school begs all the problems of school effectiveness study. Some comparison of believed and actual strengths is possible by looking at some objective data for each school and using the more subjective views expressed in interviews. The qualitative material forms the basis of a concluding section for each school which attempts to match stakeholder opinion and the reality of school strengths. This is based on the number of listed descriptors applicable for each criteria used in Fig. 3 identified in each school during visits.

## 1. CASTLE

### Background

This School, with a roll of 302 students, is a two form entry 11-16 rural comprehensive school which has evolved from the former secondary modern which served the area in the selective system until 1978. "Evolution" is used advisedly because there was no trauma in reorganisation but additional staffing was allowed so that the school could more readily cope with the additional demands made by the comprehensive curriculum. Of the existing staff four have been in post for eighteen years and another six for ten years. The current staffing ratio is 1:13.6 overall. There have been three heads in the period since the comprehensive was established. The present head was appointed three years ago.

### Environment

These are essentially 1960's flat roof type buildings but they were remodelled to meet the needs of the complete ability range and there has been continual modification of areas of the school under minor works capital allocations. Most teaching areas are "carpeted



and in excellent decorative state with bright and frequently changed displays". (County Inspector's Review). The school is situated in eleven acres of playing fields overlooked by wooded hillsides and in the heart of a village of 400 inhabitants. It has been developed as a community centre for the catchment area with the only large hall cum sports hall in the area.

### Recruitment

Students are drawn from 21 village areas and in 1991 there has been a net gain of 17 from peripheral areas which include catchment areas of two other two form entry schools, a cross border five form entry 11 - 16, and a six form entry 11 - 18 school which was the former grammar school when reorganisation was completed. There is a near normal distribution of VRQ on admission although the actual numbers at the extremes are so small that an individualised learning programme has become a feature of the school. The villages have scattered modern small housing estates for professional workers from two small market towns and the county town, all of which are within 30mins. travel time. Traditional employment is in

Table 4	Survey Results		Castle			
Respondents	Entry	Leavers	Community	Total	Staff	Descriptors
Process Factors						
Work emphasis	57.1	62.0	58.3	59.2	100	4
Teaching methods	67.8	82.7	83.3	77.7	100	2
Special facilities	78.5	72.4	70.8	74.0	60.0	3
Teaching staff help	64.2	68.9	87.5	72.8	100	4
Caring approach	89.2	58.6	100	81.4	100	3
Reports on pupils	64.2	68.9	87.5	72.8	50.0	3
Parental contact	67.8	68.9	95.8	76.5	70.0	2
Clear rules	75.0	68.9	70.8	71.6	70.0	3
Behaviour expectatns	85.7	86.2	79.1	86.4	90.0	4
Product Factors						
No. to further educa	39.2	51.7	62.5	50.0	50.0	2
Examination results	67.8	82.7	87.5	79.0	90.0	3
Pupil appearance	75.0	62.0	66.6	67.9	70.0	2
No. of respondents	28	29	24	81	10	
No. of responses	233	242	162	703	100	
No. ticking all	7		1	8	2	
Responses / return	8.3	8.3	6.7	8.6	8.7	
% respondents with other children at the School						86
% respondents attending School in the past						17
% respondents attending evening activities at the School						26
% respondents talking about School at work						61
% respondents talking about School at social events						72
% respondents talking about School with neighbours						71

Descriptors, to a maximum of 4. observed for each criterion – see Fig.3

farming, the service trades and retailing in the market towns. There is a low unemployment rate, currently less than 3%, and 4.6% of the students are entitled to free meals. There is a uniform requirement but this is stated in terms of colours only.

#### Data

This was collected during the winter of 1989-90. Interviews were arranged at community activities at the school, open evenings and by prior arrangement with members of the community. Table 4 gives the survey results. The number of respondents was high in each group of thirty. The number of positive responses indicates that overall respondents selected 8 out of the 12 factors as strengths in the school although this figure was lower from community respondents. This was possibly explained by the comment

"I don't know whether other things like teaching methods are a strength because I only see the School from the outside". (Local shopkeeper).

#### Parents on entry (Year 7)

The parents on entry had been involved in an open evening and had received introductory brochures about the

farming, the service trades and retailing in the market towns. There is a low unemployment rate, currently less than 3%, and 4.6% of the students are entitled to free meals. There is a uniform requirement but this is stated in terms of colours only.

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#### Parents on entry (Year 7)

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School. They rate the caring approach highly as they do the behaviour and expectations factor, pupil appearance and the special facilities of the School. The only factor to be seen as a strength by less than 50% of respondents was the number going on to further education.

### Leavers

The leavers, after five years of school experience still rate behaviour and expectations as a strength of the school. They rate the caring approach and pupil appearance lower than the parents, whilst being more appreciative of teaching methods and the examination results achieved within the school. They also are markedly more aware of the numbers moving to further education. Interview evidence details the difference between "what they say about the school and what sometimes really happens". (Head Boy 1990). Leavers rate emphasis on work, teaching staff help, and reporting systems, more highly than the parents, with less emphasis on facilities, clear rules and pupil appearance as strengths. One leaver commented that

"They are strong on what is expected of us and they make

a lot of the code of conduct but there seem to be some who get away with things - by the end of Year 10 it seems to be that some rules are overlooked to give the kids a quiet life and to get them to come to school ". (Year 11 student).

### Community

The Community respondents all see the caring approach as a strength substantiated by interview evidence which cites the work undertaken to accommodate Joseph, a Down's Syndrome boy, into Year 7. Work with the handicapped and slow learners was a matter for comment throughout the area as parents have readily accepted some degree of integration of those with problems so that they can be educated with their primary school friends. Parental contact is believed to be good, and interviewees mentioned parents evenings, ready access to the staff and the effectiveness of the new reports. The relationship goes deeper than the structure as one parent commented of a senior member of staff

"Mr.E. lives in the village and we have known him as a help for the last eighteen years. He listens to what is said and takes action if things are going wrong. We know

that we can talk to him." (Former student, now a parent).

Exam results are believed to be a strength and the local launch of Records of Achievement has prompted understanding of reporting systems. A local retailer who is also a parent commented that

"They have to do Work Experience and we have to do a report with them for when they leave school - its much better than a few years ago when they just came here without supervision, or much purpose."

A similarly high rating is attached to teaching staff help. Although very involved in the life of the school, the secretary of the P.T.A. spoke from a parents view point when explaining that

"We live in The Marches but would have gone to any lengths to get the children here. It is a matter of having a staff who are dedicated and willing to give extra time to those with problems. They put themselves out to help at all levels but they are especially good on those with learning problems."

Local opinion may develop from "parish pump" discussions and a dinner assistant living in a village three miles

away comments

"The staff know the children and give up time to help when things aren't right, extra classes at lunch time for instance or special help at the Unit".

Whilst behaviour is rated highly there is less strength accorded to pupil appearance by the community respondents. This may be illustrated by one comment

"We know that they have an easy uniform but some of the youngsters wear it in a sloppy way and girls in trousers don't look right . They go to pieces by the time they get off the bus". (Resident, Village 4 miles distant).

#### Total responses

Although high behaviour and expectations and the caring approach were seen as being most highly rated overall the figures mask the leavers view that the caring approach is not always carried through. This has been considered as a serious concern for the senior management of the school in planning future policy and in developing a shared staff view of the needs of individuals. In following the idea of process and product factors it is evident that whilst examination results are highly rated all other strengths are seen to be in the school experience.



Numbers to further education and pupils appearance as outcomes are ranked 10th. and 12th. overall. The lowest scoring process factor, ranked 11th. is work emphasis which might indicate that the school has been too ready to concentrate on its real achievements in "whole education".

### Staff

Ten responses gave the views of 40% of the staff. Their assessment of strengths gives some indication of the parity of view between those inside and outside the school. At Castle they were unanimous in seeing work emphasis, teaching methods, teaching staff help and a caring approach as major strengths. Almost as strong is their belief in behaviour, and the examination results obtained. Reporting systems are still not accepted by all staff and this may be reflected in the lower rating which, as investigated by interview

"May be due to the fact that some colleagues have an aversion to negotiated reporting systems and feel that the "old days" had more to offer." (Deputy Head)

There is a similar belief that the school does not make

enough of its numbers going to further education and the data may support the view that

"We ought to be doing more to attract parents by letting them know what we achieve". (Member of staff i/c Guidance).

Disparity between staff and the other groups is most marked over work emphasis but this may be due to lack of understanding of more modern methods of teaching and learning by those outside the school.

"They seem to be very happy there and get good results but they might be able to do better if there was more attention to work rather than to their activities and the trips they make." (Parent Year 10 under achiever).

#### Forming Community Opinion

Widespread belief in the strengths of Castle School must owe much to the stability and network of relationships in rural areas. Whilst the proportion of respondents who actually attended the school is less than 20% those who did do so have a feeling for the school and their views may continue to influence others. The proportion of respondents talking about the school with neighbours is high and this may be a means of transmitting positive

information.

"Maybe it is because I went to the school and feel confident in it for our youngsters", (Parent Years 7 and 9).

The high proportion of respondents with other children in the school reflects the continuity of family involvement and given the geographic spread of respondents the 61% of respondents who have talked about the school at work may be extending the "sphere of influence" because so many of them work in the peripheral towns. This may partly explain the increasing interest being shown in the school by those on the borders of the catchment area. The following comments add weight to this assertion.

"Our local school is too big, and has got a bit of a reputation for poor class behaviour". (Parent Year 9)

"Although Castle has not got a Sixth Form they do get a good grounding and they have to be responsible. What is more they are known as individuals by all the staff and that just doesn't happen at our local place. When I learnt that we could get him in here I knew that would be

the best thing". (Parent Year 9)

Further reasoning for preference for the school is shown in the statement that

"They can't do a bunk or go into the town at lunch time - it counts a lot for peace of mind even if we have to do the travelling". (Parent travelling 11 miles twice daily).

Interview evidence suggests that the local grapevine with neighbours and at social events is both active and an opinion former. This is shown in the comments

"Our friends said that it would be worth looking and we had heard it talked about both when we were at the primary school and when we were out socially. Its all to do with size. They know the pupils, they know the families too and they know what they want the kids to do. I have friends who know the Head outside school and they were impressed with his view that a little school can do great things. You can't escape the exam results, they are among the best in the county and that is all the evidence we want. (Parent Year 7).

Discussion with the staff and the Chairman of governors offered evidence that the reputation was subject to



"management". All events are reported to the local press as they occur, there is a termly newsletter to parents and there is "common celebration of success" both in the displays in the school but also in travelling displays to associated primary schools. One significant change has been that a comparative exercise has been carried out as a result of which the school brochure has been "lightened in tone, brightened in appearance and reduced in density" (Head) so that it can "convey a sense of purpose but the inherent brightness and happiness of the place is not neglected."

The rural situation with a well developed network of parents and friends (with a committee of 34 workers) ensures that the profile of the school is maintained throughout the area. Community use of premises is encouraged both through lettings and a programme of evening classes and the school has a weekly family night with parents and students involved in sports and social activities. In short

"We believe that the school is an extension of the family and that we can do the best for everyone because we are

small enough still to be a family " (P.T.A. Representative).

#### Performance Indicators

In 1991 50 of the year 11 students took GCSE examinations. Of these 38% gained 5 subjects above grade C (County average 25.2%), and 59% gained at least 1 grade C (County average 62.8%). Using a numerical equivalent of GCSE A=7, B=6 and so on, the "score" per student in Year 11 was 28.6, well above the county average of 22. Considering the nature of the intake the results are better than would be expected given the comparatively low number of able children. 58% moved to further education, 30% to training schemes, 8% to paid employment and 4% were unemployed from the year group of 50. Attendance rates averaged 94% in the Spring Term 1990 and there were no court cases in the past year.

#### Conclusion

It thus seems from all these indicators that the high opinion of the school held by the community is justified but the real feeling for the school is related to the concept of happiness (Coldron and Boulton, 1991) and this can only be ascertained from the positive response of the

students interviewed in the course of this investigation. These are illustrated from the following comments from a group of students.

"I know that I count and that I belong". (Student Year 8).

"You want to do well because you feel that you are letting the staff down if you don't succeed". (Year 10).

"All school is awful but this is better than any my mates talk about". (Out of area, low achiever, Year 10) The school is successful both in its measurable achievement and in the way in which it demonstrates shared staff and student values. Curriculum, organisation and philosophy are all known to all participants and developed according to national and local need with an over-riding concern that each student should feel wanted. This view is transmitted to the community served by the school and is reflected in the fact that in thirty interviews only four negative points were made. In considering the number of descriptors from Fig.3 evident in the school for each criteria rated by stakeholders there appears to be limited understanding of work emphasis and too generous

an assessment of teaching methods and parental contact by the respondents. In all other respects there is some degree of correspondence between perception and reality.

## 2. ALBERT SCHOOL

### Background

This urban comprehensive school was established in 1986 by moving pupils from a secondary modern school some three miles distant into the buildings vacated by a former girls grammar school. The first comprehensive intake from 1986 has thus developed alongside the former selective intake for the past five years. The decision that this should be one of two 11-16 schools with three much larger 11-18 schools within travelling distance has created problems for the school in establishing a new identity. There are a grant-maintained grammar school and three independent schools in the area. The current roll of 620 is growing as the comprehensive five form entry is established. All staff were appointed to the school as a result of total reorganisation in the area but a majority were formerly at the secondary modern school including three house heads and the deputy head, pastoral. The Head



was appointed from outside the area. The current staffing ratio is 1:16.6 overall including the additional staffing for an area learning difficulties unit.

### Environment

The school is set in eleven acres of grounds in an elevated position and the main buildings are around a double quadrangle described as "1930s mock classical". The corridors are wide and the rooms large and high. New additions include a purpose built Design and Technology Block and a minor works adaptation to improve the entrance and to set the Library as a resources centre at the "heart of the school in both accommodation and academic terms". (Report of Senior County Advisor, 1989) There has been considerable refurbishment in the past two years including carpeting of corridor and classroom areas.

### Recruitment

The designated area for catchment is the central part of a large town which, because of its growth from a spa resort, has many multiple occupancy houses. There is a large area of council housing within the catchment area

and many of the students from the former secondary modern school catchment area come from council estates on the periphery of the town. There are owner occupied estates within the catchment area but there is a loss of some forty students a year from these areas to the 11-18 established comprehensive schools in the greenfield areas less than two miles from Albert School. The effect is to depress the overall VRQ of students on entry and there are very few with a score of over 110; there is an imbalance of those with special needs. It is difficult to obtain accurate data on the social make-up of the catchment area because there are many retired "flat" dwellers and because many of the buildings are occupied on short tenancy agreements by students in the area. However, current "town" unemployment is running at 7%. It is perhaps more significant that 24% of the students of the school have free meals. The school has a uniform policy and enforcement is achieved through help with maintenance grants from a number of sources. The Head comments

"There are a significant number of our local children who have to cope with the problems of poverty, emotional and

Table 5

## Albert

Respondents	Entry	Leavers	Community	Total	Staff	Descriptors
Process Factors						
Work emphasis	66.6	16.6	26.6	52.7	88.8	3
Teaching methods	80	66.6	40	61.1	77.7	2
Special facilities	86.6	100	60	77.7	88.8	3
Teaching staff help	73.3	83.3	46.6	63.8	88.8	3
Caring approach	80	50	46.6	61.1	77.7	3
Reports on pupils	80	100	33.3	68.8	77.7	3
Parental contact	80	66.6	60	69.4	77.7	3
Clear rules	73.3	66.6	60	66.6	66.6	2
Behaviour expectatns	86.6	16.6	40	55.5	55.5	3
Product Factors						
No. to further educa	6.6	16.6	13.3	11.1	0	1
Examination results	33.3	16.6	6.6	19.4	55.5	2
Pupil appearance	80	66.6	40	61.1	66.6	3
No. of respondents	30	12	30	72	9	
No. of responses	248	80	142	470	74	
No. ticking all	1	0	1	2	2	
Responses / return	8.2	6.6	4.7	6.5	8.2	
% respondents with other children at the School					50	
% respondents attending School in the past					6.25	
% respondents attending evening activities at the School					10	
% respondents talking about the School at work					52.6	
% respondents talking about the School at social events					60.5	
% respondents talking about School with neighbours					68.4	

Descriptors, to a maximum of 4, observed for each criterion - see Fig.3

social deprivation and downright abuse".

A comment from one member of staff on the nature of recruitment may be significant if it is held to be true by members of the community,

"The Head made a great deal out of all that was being done to help the least able. As a result we lost some of the high fliers in the first three years of the school and it takes some time to convince the public that we do cater for all abilities". (House Head)

#### Data

Survey data was collected during the Spring Term 1991. Interviews were arranged with leaving students, parents attending an open evening, and local community during the Summer Term 1991. Survey data is given in Table 5 .The number of positive responses overall masks the fact that there was a high positive response from new parents and a low positive response from the local community - both these sections were further investigated in interviews.

#### Parents on Entry (Year 7)

The parents on entry had been involved in an open evening



and had had access to publicity material and a video presentation used in all designated primary schools. Strengths were seen to lie in the special facilities and the high behaviour expectations asked of students. The existence of the Special Learning Unit was seen as a particular facility and one parent commented

"We saw all the specialist rooms and thought that the Learning Unit and the Library showed that they wanted to help the children". (Parent out of catchment area).

There seems to be a view that the school is particularly suited to those of average and below average ability and that facilities and the highly rated teaching methods are appropriate only for these students. One comment was "We noticed the new craft rooms - they are superb and show that the school is the right place if your child is going to be a practical sort."

High expectations of behaviour had been stressed to parents at entry both by concentration on uniform and in the way in which the modest size of school ensured that students were known and that problems were dealt with.

"The woman deputy is a bit fierce but she seems to be the one who gets the kids to do as they are told, and they do

all do their best with uniform". (Parents Years 7 and 9). Parental contact and the nature of the reporting system had both been the subject of local comment because of the policy of posting a termly letter to all parents and because a pilot reporting system had involved a negotiated section with parents as well as students.

"The school contacts us regularly although it costs money. We are made to feel welcome but I think that it is only a small proportion, mainly the more professional people who take advantage of the system". (Parent out of catchment area).

The weaker features were seen to be the examination results although parental comment shows awareness of the background.

"We know it will be some while before these get better - its not so important if your child isn't bright, we are more concerned that he should be happy". (Parent Year7, and local retailer).

For similar reasons there is not much awareness of numbers moving to further education and as a head of department commented

"You can't use those to judge until we get a proper group".

### Leavers

This group is a small sample (15%) of the year group, but they were all interviewed as a follow up to the survey responses. They saw the facilities of the school as outstanding, as they did the reporting system (a traditional type but involving parental interview) and gave high rating to teaching staff help.

"I was a school phobic after bullying at primary and at the local comp. I was happy here because they were quick to act if things went wrong and I was able to be an individual without people saying I was a swot. The Unit has helped me to do extension work in the last year - it is a great challenge". (Boy, out of area).

Others are less enthusiastic about the caring approach

"its all right if your face fits but once they get it in for you it travels round like anything - especially if they know in the staff room". (Girl, in area).

There is also tension between the stated policy of the school and the reality of student behaviour and staff

emphasis on work. The leavers rationalise this in terms of the secondary modern students who have always been their senior students but

"there are some students who the staff let get on in their own way to stop confrontation and they turn a blind eye to some of the complaints about bullying - we just have to get on with it, but things are getting better".

"By this stage it is yourself who settles whether you will get on or not and there are some dossers who are not chased for work, almost as if staff are waiting for them to go". (Both comments from boy, highest VRQ in Year).

The low, but slightly higher recognition of numbers moving to further education may indicate awareness after the guidance process.

#### Community

This group have reacted on the basis of the change of use of the school and the introduction of boys into the area.

"We never had any trouble with the girls, but then it was a grammar school and it had standards. Now they play football and the ball comes over the hedge and they aren't always as polite as they should be" (Neighbour)



The lack of local understanding is reflected in low ratings for most features of the school but there is a group of respondents, at some distance from the school who felt that, compared with two other schools in the area, there was good contact with the parents, that there were clear rules, and that the appearance of students was a strength,

"because they use the service buses you see what they are really like and I am full of praise for most of them - as a passenger they have always treated me with courtesy even if they are a bit loud at times". ('Bus user, respondent).

"If I had to make a choice I know that I would send my children to Albert. They have a uniform and keep to it, they have acted as soon as there have been any complaints such as litter, and the staff are seen in the area." (Neighbour).

Increased community understanding may be a result of availability of the school facilities for evening classes, lettings and recreational groups including weekend users.

"The results seem to be pretty awful but then you have to

remember that it is still a young school - it isn't the grammar school it was, but it isn't all bad. I belong to the Badminton Club and I see what they have been doing to improve things". (Evening user)

Low ratings for examination results, work emphasis, and numbers moving to further education may be related to current "misconceptions, not about what the school is but about what it isn't". (Governor). In any comparison of results the school is disadvantaged by the low ability level of its intake to date and by the greater academic emphasis which has attracted more able students to the 11-18 schools.

#### Total responses

This was affected both by the low community ratings and by the small number of leaver respondents. The school have however, taken the figures as a "guide to the areas where work has to be undertaken". (Head). A major policy review is underway to improve perceptions of a caring approach and to stress the emphasis on work within the school. Pupil appearance is the only outcome factor to score at the same level as the process factors;

examination results and numbers to further education are ranked 11th. and 12th. in the sequence of strengths.

### Staff

Responses were gathered from 22% of the staff. Other work in the school has shown that there is some tension largely because the senior staff are seen "as a tight group, quick to tell, but not quick to communicate" (Standard scale teacher).

The tension which this causes may be shown in the lower rating for behaviour and expectations because of disagreement over "positive encouragement" policies between the Head and some established staff.

"He is a lovely man and listens to everybody but he will always take the kid's side and fall over backwards to help. That's why we have so many who have been thrown out from other schools." (Head of Department, ex-sec.mod staff).

Considerable anxieties about examination results and numbers moving to further education may be allayed as the comprehensive intake reaches the senior years of the school. There is also concern at the small number of

parents with whom regular contact is maintained and some reaction against the pastoral power group who, staff comment, determine matters which require consultation with those responsible for academic development.

"They are inclined to take an old fashioned view of discipline as a result of which it is rather repressive and loud. We could do a lot more, for a lot more kids to show them that we care and that we want to find out why they have such difficulty with work that they cannot succeed." (Head of Department appointed 1989).

#### Forming Community Opinion

Mention has been made of the process for recruitment visits to primary schools. The school is "reputation conscious" and has recently produced a video package for use by primary schools, interest groups in the area and community volunteer groups. There is a rapid response to any local complaint and this is sometimes felt to be unfair by leavers one of who commented

"One of the visitors to school said that there was too much litter in the area and we had to go and pick it up in all the alleyways - they forget the Tech. is next



door". (Leaver in Soc. Ed. group).

Attendance at policy planning meetings indicated the tension between those staff who felt that the school should build upon its strengths with the least able and those with problems, and those who feel that there should be every endeavour to build up the community reputation to attract children from the "middle class" areas who are currently attending the 11-18 schools on the basis of their proven academic record. The contrast is shown though in comments as follows,

"we are best for the youngsters for whom there is no place elsewhere and for whom we have particular experience". (Head of House)

"Our future depends on getting the parents of the other schools to realise that they have a good academic school on their doorstep". (Head of Department).

Recruitment shows that at present the former view is held in the community and the school is increasingly attracting those with learning difficulties or those whose parents feel that there is much more likelihood of care in the smaller school. Analysis of interviews shows

either or both of these facts mentioned by all parents and the comparatively high number of respondents talking about school with neighbours suggests that the local network will be aware of these perceived advantages.

A parent living in the most depressed part of the catchment area gives a positive view in saying

"Compared with the other schools it is small enough to take action when things go wrong like with the bullying outside the shops when the Albert lot were set on by kids from Grange - it wasn't the Grange staff that did anything to sort it out. Being small they also get special help with their reading." (Parent, low achiever). There is a school awareness of community networks, and, although the numbers having previous connections with the school are small, respondents knew of the available facilities and social events centred on the school. Only half of the respondents had talked about the school at work. It may be that this is because of the nature of employment locally with a great many parents working in temporary service situations where relationships between workers are not sufficiently stable for family matters to

be discussed but it may be related to social class because such parents have been slow to do other than accept the designated school.

### Performance Indicators

Objective data are difficult to find for Albert is still in its early stages of development. GCSE results for 1991 were "encouraging" with 17% of the 144 students in Year 11 gaining five or more A-C passes ( County average 27%), and 60% gaining at least one higher grade pass ( County average 68%). The average score of 16.4 points reflects the fact that most of the year were the product of the former secondary modern system. Numbers moving to further education at 48% are lower than had been anticipated but 28% are entering training schemes and a further 10% paid employment. The school has had a comparatively low attendance rate at 86% in 1990 but this has been the focus of concerted action by all tutors and systems are in place to reduce both truancy and "bunking of" - the local press has been made aware of both the strategies and the recent improvement to 92%.

"If we are a caring school then we have to care about

those we would rather let slip away - it is as much a matter of staff approach, and of letting the parents and community know that we bother, as it is of driving the unwilling." (Head)

### Conclusion

The school is effective in its work with students as individuals and recent staff appointments are resulting in greater emphasis on work and examination achievement. As yet these are not understood by the stakeholders as a group although there is evidence that the parents at entry appreciated what the school is trying to do. It is a school which cares, although at times in a rather repressive way - discipline has to be seen to be effective, and it is concerned with the development of policies which will involve the community in the use of the special facilities which exist. The comment that it is a young school may explain the way in which "ethos" has been slow to develop and why the reputation of the antecedent schools creates current difficulties. The consistency of total stakeholder scoring of criteria with the reality of a developing school is possibly accurate. There is a lower leavers and community perception of work



emphasis than is warranted in a school which has made this a fundamental feature of its development plan and a similar harshness in the view of behaviour and expectations. The low scoring for numbers moving to further education and examination results is recognised as a fair assessment by the school.

### 3. VALE SCHOOL

#### Background

This 11-16 school was developed in 1986 from a former secondary modern school on the same site. As part of a reorganisation in a division of the county the staff were able to apply for all posts in all reorganised schools. The nature of the loyalty to the school may be judged from the fact that 60% of the existing staff were formerly associated with the school. The Head had been former head of the secondary modern school. There are currently 720 students on roll and the year 7 group is being allowed to grow to six form entry. The staffing ratio is 1:18 overall including 0.5 for help with an

articled teacher for two years. Although situated on a greenfield site in the middle of modern housing estates, the school has two 11-18, and two 11-16 comprehensive schools within two miles. There are two grammar schools in the same area and the southern fringe of the designated catchment area is now also served by a grant maintained school.

#### Environment

The buildings are modern with the secondary modern premises having been extended and supplemented by extensive science and technology provision in 1987. Temporary rooms are currently in use pending the completion of new humanities accommodation in 1992. A programme of refurbishment is resulting in the carpeting of all teaching areas and the upper corridors. There are 14 acres of playing fields completely surrounded by the gardens of the owner occupied estate areas. The buildings are used by the county adult education service on three nights per week. Discussions are underway for this work to be integrated with that of the school.

#### Recruitment

The school has traditionally recruited from seven

villages on the rural fringe of the county town. Since 1987 it has also drawn its students from the three estates already mentioned. With the removal of "official" catchment areas in 1990 it has also recruited a considerable number from the inner city area along a wedge of the public transport network. There is considerable creaming of more able students from the catchment area to selective schools. Of the 180 accepted for 1991 only 22 have a VRQ of over 100 and only 1 in excess of 120. Employment statistics for the area are a poor guide to the background of the intake because the students are drawn from a wide range of situations. The district of the southern villages has a low rate of unemployment at 4% but within the industrial area this rises to 8.9%. Free meals are provided for 12% of the school. There is a firm uniform policy but only the ties are from designated suppliers.

#### Data

Data was collected by surveys in the Summer of 1991. This also included a much larger group of leavers as requested by the school. Interviews were conducted

Table 6

Vale

Respondents	Entry	Leavers	Community	Total	Staff	Descriptors
Process Factors						
Work emphasis	68	62	73.3	66.6	88.8	3
Teaching methods	76	30	60	49.5	77.7	3
Special facilities	76	98	80	78	88.8	4
Teaching staff help	64	48	86.6	62.8	88.8	3
Caring approach	76	48	93.3	67.6	77.7	4
Reports on pupils	68	60	66.6	63.8	77.7	3
Parental contact	68	70	93.3	78.4	77.7	4
Clear rules	72	50	100	69.5	66.6	3
Behaviour expectatns	64	38	100	61.9	55.5	3
Product Factors						
No. to further educa	20	14	13.3	15.2	0	2
Examination results	48	58	46.6	52.3	55.5	2
Pupil appearance	72	70	66.6	69.5	66.6	4
No. of respondents	25	50	30	105	9	
No. of responses	193	323	264	780	74	
No. ticking all	2	2	1	5	2	
Responses / return	7.72	6.46	8.8	7.4	8.2	
% respondents with other children at the School					79	
% respondents attending School in the past					16.2	
% respondents attending evening activities at the School					20.9	
% respondents talking about the School at work					72.5	
% respondents talking about the School at social events					43.1	
% respondents talking about School with neighbours					78.4	

Descriptors, to a maximum of 4, observed for each criterion – see Fig.3



throughout the Spring and Summer of 1991. Additional data on school effectiveness was collected at the request of the school. Table 6 gives the survey results. The number of respondents was high in each group and the number of positive responses was above the average for the seven schools in the study.

#### Parents on entry

With the exception of lower ratings for examination results and numbers moving to further education, there is an even response for most characteristics. The parents average positive response for 7.7 out of a possible 12 factors is high and this level of support is borne out in interview material.

"We know that it is a school where the staff care. They seem to have a range of approaches suited to the needs of the children and it is accessible without a difficult bus journey". (Parent Year7).

"The school bus goes to Vale School and we know that some of the staff have been there a long while. They have bits about the school in the paper and it has got a reputation for behaviour and doing as they are told." (Parent Year 7, rural catchment).

"The school seems to be better than St.Marks or The Port because it is in a nice area and when we went to look at it they told us about the way they teach and showed us the good accommodation. The youngsters seemed to be happy and we were welcomed by the staff we met". (Parent Year 7, inner city catchment).

In the interviews there was considerable attention to student happiness and the convenience of transport networks rather than to the strengths of the school. This accords with the work by Adler, Petch and Tweedie (1989) in their consideration of the "convenience" factor, and with Coldron and Boulton (1991) on student happiness. This case study school was one where there was some evident confusion between judgement and reasons for choice of school.

### Leavers

The high number of leaver respondents recognised over half the features listed as strengths overall. The high rating for special facilities may have been the result of living in the school during a period of refurbishment but "there is plenty of access to computers and we are

allowed to use the Library as a resource place at any time with staff supervision; we also have good machines in the craft areas and have had a lot of new science stuff." (Leaver, middle ability band).

Parental contact and pupil appearance are recognised as strengths by 70% but there is some feeling that there has been staff inconsistency in teaching help and methods and caring approach, and the view is expressed that, despite the strength of clear rules, behaviour and expectations are not what they might be.

"We are always being told about the Code of Conduct but not all the teachers put it into practice - in some lessons because we are working on our own there is a lot of messing about". (Leaver upper ability band)

"I know that there are some staff who do a lot for their kids but we have got a tutor who just says to get along on our own and we don't have the sort of discussion that others get" (Leaver lower ability band)

"Why do we all have to do languages? Look at what happens to us, making little pamphlets with words you look up in the dictionary. I finished colouring pictures in primary school. I would rather have three more lessons of design

each week" (Leaver, previous regular truant).

### Community

The data collected for a full group of respondents shows some very high ratings with an average of just under 75%. The sample was drawn from all environments within the catchment area and attempted to draw on a range of local inhabitants including doctors, police and clergy. The maximum ratings for rules and expectations may be related to

"the way in which they have had a new start since the old sec.mod. closed. There are problems about behaviour out of school but Mr.L. is always ready to listen - and the kids hear about it." (Shopkeeper).

"A lot of the community go into the school each week to help with assemblies and tutor periods. It is a hub for the estate and people are ready to do their bit for their school". (Policeman, local area).

"We have noticed that things are better since they had the new uniform, more pride and that sort of thing. They aren't angels but a lot of us go to classes in the school on Wednesdays and Thursdays and we are getting to know



the staff. A lot of them were part of the old sec.mod. and some of us went there then." (Neighbour to school). The lowest ratings are given for examination results and numbers going to further education. This may be because old views of the school remain but there is understanding of the comparative disadvantage when so many of the brighter students have gone to the grammar and 11-18 schools. It was summed up by a local dentist, also a parent who said,

"It takes some courage to accept that the results here will never be good whilst the selective system remains but my kids have been happy and have been stretched to their limits without harmful pressure - they have learnt to get on with others and they know that they are individuals but that the staff know them".

Discussion showed that many of the community do not understand newer teaching approaches. This may explain the lower rating of teaching methods as a strength. One comment was

"They seem to spend too much of their time finding out, either on the field or on the estates - they need to know about learning facts so that they can do mental

arithmetic and learn their spellings". (Craftsman employer).

#### Total response

The effect of the leavers responses has been to temper the positive community view of the school but with the exception of teaching methods and numbers to further education more than half of the respondents accord some strength to each characteristic. The high proportion of respondents with other children in the school or attending evening classes may explain the knowledge shown by stakeholders - it is a known situation for them. This may be reflected in the concentration on process factors. Only pupil appearance as an outcome scores as high as any of the process factors. Exam results and numbers to further education rank 10th. and 12th. respectively.

#### Staff

The responses from 26% of the staff may reflect a great deal of self-evaluation as a result of total involvement in the school development plan.

"We haven't got it right yet. There are too many high fliers we can't attract and there is still a hangover

from the 'keep them occupied' view of the old sec. mod. Our expectations ought to be much higher." (Head of Year)

The higher rating for reporting systems may be due to the recent introduction of profile reporting to year 7. The importance attached to work emphasis is seen as greater by staff than by any other group but this may be explained by the all out attempt to introduce effective differentiation throughout the school, a policy which has not yet been "sold" to the parents or the community. There is no mention of numbers going to further education as a strength but interviews showed an intense awareness that numbers were low,

"We have got to see why those who have gone on to sixth form haven't lasted the course - it could be that we have cosseted them too much here, or it could mean that the students feel inferior at the other places" (Deputy Head).

#### Forming Community Opinion

The school has faced problems in that there are a small group of governors from the secondary modern days who feel that the designation "comprehensive" should bring with it an automatic comparability of GCSE results with those of neighbouring schools.

"We went comprehensive in 1986 and the staff should have got things together by now" has not proved helpful to morale.

Consequently there has been a policy of community involvement in the life of the school including social education, shared classes, use of facilities and joint activities. Brochures are modest, although widely available, and there is a well developed liaison with 23 primary schools providing students for the school in the past. The reasons for choice of school reflect the community perceptions of school strengths.

"They bother about uniform and behaviour and if that is right the rest will follow". (Parent year 7)

"The school is still trying to get the best results it can but I know that the head is around the place and that he isn't afraid to go into lessons if things don't look right. That keeps them all on their toes." (Parent year 7).

"I went to the old school. They were tougher kids then but they have got over that now and the school has got a good reputation in the village because it stops the



bullying - they jumped when we told them that we had heard there were drugs on the go." (Parent Year 7 and 9). There is an attempt to match curriculum development to community opportunities not only in social education but also in humanities, design technology and the performing arts so that

"we can build bridges, show that we care and show that the young people are mature enough to do positive things in the area". (Deputy Head)

In community terms the readiness to act decisively in dealing with misbehaviour travels quickly along the local grapevine. As one community member commented

"if they suspend a student we get to know in the village as soon as the bus gets in - they are all aware of what will happen if you misbehave, it keeps them in line".

(Local policeman and P.T.A. representative).

Awareness of community perceptions is shown in the starting phrases of the relevant section of the staff handbook "Our reputation for cleanliness, attractive room, and well kept grounds is essential for our success. We must maintain recruitment and so must offer a superior package. The visual impact should be attractive and

stimulating." Management acts accordingly.

Education has been a prominent topic in the area with four reorganisation schemes under discussion before an eventual scheme was approved and subsequent media attention to the problems of open enrolment in selective schooling areas. This may explain the high proportion of respondents talking about the school at work or with neighbours. The lower proportion talking about the school at social events may reflect the pattern of social behaviour with poorly developed facilities on the estates or in the villages and with a scatter of students from the inner city areas. The reaction of the management team to these figures is to suggest that more needs to be done to develop the school as the community focus in social activities and discussions are under way to secure some joint funding for this.

#### Performance Indicators

The first comprehensive group took GCSE in 1991 and results are described as "good, given the fact that the average VRQ for the group was 92.7". Of the year group of 119, 10% gained 5 or more GCSE A-C grades (County average

27% ), and 52% gained at least one higher grade (County average 68%) whilst the score per student was 18.6, comparable with other ex.secondary modern schools in the area. Numbers moving to further education have already been mentioned as a cause for concern. 13% have gone to technical College, 15% moved to sixth form provision, 23% to training schemes and 15% to paid employment. The remainder of the cohort are unaccounted for. Attendance is maintained at 94% as a result of "rapid action" after two days and home visits are common to ensure parental compliance. There have been five court cases in the past year but this is explained by the fact that of these four were in county care and were transient members of the school. Exclusion of students occurs about three times per term.

### Conclusion

This school sets out to achieve its aims of providing individualised and supportive systems for students of average and below ability. This is achieved by a variety of teaching methods, willingness to help and a caring approach with an integrated tutorial and social education philosophy. Students are known as individuals and they

know the framework within which they can live in the school. As one commented

"It isn't worth trying to get off school because they see you going through the gate; its not worth missing time because you have to get the work done - and its not that bad anyway". (Leaver middle band).

How bad might be measured from some of the responses to a quality of school life questionnaire. Although selective in the data given it showed

76.5 students "enjoyed most of the teaching",

61.2% are "happy at school",

79% are "keen to attend all or most lessons" and

85% believe that "teachers get the best from me all or most of the time".

In so far as this data can support other survey results it may be significant that only 16% feel that they could go to teachers with problems "often or always". This may accord with the comparatively low ratings for teaching staff help and a caring approach given by the leavers. It may be summed up by one of the leavers

"I wouldn't want to go anywhere else because they teach



you well and we have a lot going for us socially but I sometimes feel that I am a nuisance if I want extra help - they have so much else to do getting ready for the next lesson" (Leaver upper ability band).

Overall school practices and policies are strongest in the drive for improved facilities and in the attempt to meet parents in a partnership, both of which are highly rated by stakeholders. Moderate rating on all other counts reflects the recent l.e.a. evaluation which has suggested that changes underway have to be fully implemented. These affect the leavers group who bring down total rating of strengths but even so the degree of match between perceptions and reality appears to be high.

#### 4. THREE CROSSES SCHOOL

##### Background

The school was formed in 1978 by the amalgamation of a two form entry grammar school and a six form entry secondary modern school, initially using both sites but moving to the more extensive secondary modern site in 1986 following rebuilding. Although all staff from the

two schools were absorbed there was difficulty in finding a structure which satisfied both groups of staff and the consequent polarisation has only been overcome since the appointment of a head from outside the area in 1985. A number of protected posts resulted in some overstaffing which gives an overall ratio of 1:16.2. The 11 -18 school has 1120 on roll with a sixth form of 120.

### Environment

The school has a seventeen acre site on the fringe of a rural town. The site is sandwiched between a dual carriageway motorway and an extensive area of council housing. The buildings consist of the former secondary modern school with wide corridors and large rooms on either side of a main hall and administration area. The building is tiled throughout and is resonant to sound. The new lower school block is carpeted throughout but suffers from external noise from the trunk road. The rooms in this building are small by comparison and staff and students complain of feeling cramped. There is a joint agreement sports hall on the site. All visitors to the school have to pass the upper school classrooms

before gaining access to the building. Community use of facilities occurs throughout the week but administration is by the l.e.a adult education section and is under separate management.

### Recruitment

Until 1990 the designated catchment area was the 8,000 inhabitant town and the surrounding rural area. There are ten primary schools in the liaison arrangement developed within the area. There is a good bus service to two county towns equidistant from Three Crosses and this has led to some 20% of the possible catchment area numbers attending independent schools, and two alternative voluntary aided schools. These were formerly grammar schools and, although smaller in size and catering for 11-16 only, enjoy considerable support from the church communities. Since 1989 there has been an increase in numbers coming to the school from outside the catchment area. Interview evidence suggests that this is related to the existence of a wider range of courses than the designated 11-16 schools which would be the alternatives and that the transport network facilitates such a choice. The effect of these pressures is to give a slightly

Table 7

## Three Crosses

Respondents	Entry	Leavers	Community	Total	Staff	Descriptors
Process Factors						
Work emphasis	75	83.3	56	71.2	50	3
Teaching methods	62.5	79.1	60	67.1	90	3
Special facilities	62.5	50	36	49.3	70	2
Teaching staff help	66.6	95.8	56	72.6	90	2
Caring approach	58.3	58.3	48	54.7	100	3
Reports on pupils	79.1	50	88	72.6	50	3
Parental contact	75	58.3	84	72.6	60	2
Clear rules	33.3	70.8	80	61.6	80	2
Behaviour expectatns	33.3	50	44	42.4	60	3
Product Factors						
No. to further educa	79.1	87.5	56	73.9	30	3
Examination results	55.8	87.5	80	73.9	100	3
Pupil appearance	25	29.1	40	31.5	40	3
No. of respondents	24	24	25	73	10	
No. of responses	179	192	182	553	77	
No. ticking all	0	0	3	3	1	
Responses / return	7.5	8	7.3	7.6	7.7	
% respondents with other children at the School					44	
% respondents attending School in the past					19	
% respondents attending evening activities at the School					60	
% respondents talking about the School at work					53.4	
% respondents talking about the School at social events					46.6	
% respondents talking about School with neighbours					43.8	

Descriptors, to a maximum of 4, observed for each criterion - see Fig.3



downwards skewing of ability but in an eight form entry school two "good top sets" with a VRQ of 115 are maintained. There is a low rate of local unemployment, currently at 4.2%. Analysis by the school shows a tendency for up to one quarter of the children from the newer "professional" housing estates to move outside the town for secondary education. The school has 13% taking free meals and this may reflect the higher proportion from less affluent families. The poorer areas of the town are situated adjacent to the school and two miles distant across the town - the students are thus in the public eye as they move to and from school. There are ten buses from rural areas. These villages have all had some recent estate growth but largely act as dormitory areas for the two county towns. Rural employment is declining. The school has a firm uniform policy but only requires badges and ties to be purchased from the school as supplier.

Data Data was collected between September 1989 and May 1990 and is summarised in Table 7 . Interviews were held at parents evenings, within the town and with community users of the site. The number of respondents with

experience of the school, either through attendance at one of the antecedent schools, or because members of the family have attended or because of activities involvement is high. So too is the degree of positive response with over 75% of the responses indicating school strengths.

#### Parents on Entry (Year 7)

Brochures are circulated to all contributory schools and in libraries during the Autumn term each year. An open evening, advertised in the local press, is held each November. Although there is a relatively high rate of positive identification of strengths of the school overall there are no outstandingly high ratings. The higher ratings given to numbers moving to further education and the reporting system may be related to items in the local press with an annual account of student destinations and the relationship of this to a well developed record of achievement system. This was explained by one parent who said,

"We know that they have a good report system because they had a big presentation last week - its all tied up with knowing what they are doing and where they need to improve." (Parent , town area).

Parental contact and work emphasis are also rated highly and it may be that previous experience of the school has much to do with this. One parent commented

"I have to say that the school has done well for us in the past and I don't see why it shouldn't do so now; the other two have been in top sets and they get a lot of encouragement and good old-fashioned learning" (Parent years 7,9,10).

The lower scores for pupil appearance, rules and expectations reflect an oft expressed anxiety. It is possible that the nature of the Open Evening for new parents was too relaxed and the degree of excitement shown by the students present as guides and demonstrators may have been counter-productive. Most worrying to the Head was the interview comment,

"There is very little attention to uniform and they really do look a mess about the town. Then they say there is a lot of indiscipline because it used to be the secondary modern school, and that's bound to give poor results" (Parent Year 7, before visit to school).

## Leavers

This group is the most positive in its assessment of school strengths. Work emphasis, teaching methods, help given by teaching staff, examination results, and further education are all highly regarded. Comments include the following

"When I came here I just wanted to get school over with but the school has done something for me if it has motivated me to go on to university. That must be down to the staff, or maybe it was because I was made to do some work, I got stretched I suppose." (Leaver Year13).

The local campaign for improvement in facilities may have affected the low rating of this as a strength given by this group and was commented upon as follows

"my mates go to Mercers College and they have much better facilities than we do - our labs are poorly equipped, the design block is old fashioned and you have to book a computer rather than use it when appropriate." (Leaver Year 13).

There is mismatch between the clear school rules and actual behaviour and this is mentioned in seven of the eight interviews with leavers.



"There is a lot said about behaviour and Mr.U. is in charge of discipline and acts pretty ferocious at times but there are some of the lower ability sets where the staff only just cope and they let things go rather than stir up trouble - it shows mostly in the way people wear their uniform". ( Leaver, Deputy Head Boy).

The comparatively low rating for the report system may be attributed to the experience these leavers have had of an unsatisfactory pilot scheme which was detailed as follows

"The new system was confusing and the staff didn't have the time to talk to us about what we were doing - my parents wanted the old slips which told the teachers' opinions. (Leaver Year11)

### Community

The stability of many families in the town; the use of Hall, Sports Hall and the evening classes, and the involvement of students in a complex pattern of work experience, may explain the high degree of awareness shown by respondents. Examination results, parental contact, the existence of clear rules and the reporting

system have been given local publicity but once again behaviour (as opposed to rules), and pupil appearance are rated low. One respondent commented that

"I am told it is a good school but the uniform seems to be very sloppy as they go past. Why do they let them wear it as they do, ties at half mast, baggy trousers, short skirts and so on. People may judge wrongly but that is how they do." ( Local resident, former grammar school pupil).

The low rating for special facilities may result from the degree of local publicity given to the need for further new buildings and equipment compared with the commissioning of new science and performing arts facilities in the independent schools.

In an attempt to understand the comparatively low rating given to teaching staff help and a caring approach further interviews were undertaken. These showed disillusionment with the worst effects of the banding system, even at sixth form level. One employer commented on the attitude shown to a work experience student

"She stayed to do the CPVE course but was a sort of second rate group in the sixth. She wasn't thick but she

felt she was inferior to the academics". (Placement employer for CPVE Care Course). A further comment was, "It isn't so good though for the lower ability students who seem to have less successful or temporary staff unless they are fortunate enough to be in the unit". (Head, feeder primary school).

#### Total responses

These show some consistency in rating examination results as a strength and concern for behaviour and appearance. The inconsistency in matters of rules and teaching staff help is masked by aggregation and this provides evidence of the need to follow Reynolds and Reid (1985) view that it is the individual experience which is the most significant guide. The proportion of respondents with other children at the school was less than 50% and this contrasted markedly with other schools in this investigation but the proportion with experience of evening activities was much higher. This may have enhanced the basis of knowledge of the school from the community. Numbers to further education, and examination results as strengths rate marginally higher than any of

the process factors. Pupil appearance as an outcome is however, the lowest rated of all characteristics.

### Staff

All respondents forming 16% of the total staff see the caring approach and examination results as strong features of the school with nine of the ten staff evaluating teaching methods and subject staff support as strengths. The contrast between these ratings and the much lower stakeholders' perceptions of a caring approach has been the basis of staff discussions on more effective pastoral care. The low rating for work emphasis and pupil appearance may reflect continuing discussion about standards in former times.

"We used to have no trouble in getting the kids to work but now it isn't the fashion and many of the school are just being kept happy." (Head of Dept. ex grammar staff).  
"I can't think why we got rid of the blazers - so many mutant turtles on outer garments can't do the school any good". (Staff member, Special Unit).

### Forming Community Links

Mention has been made of local press publicity and the community awareness of the school in the town. The



comment of a local retailer suggests that this might be counterproductive

"They have made an effort to keep the children out of the town....I don't know whether it is a good school....they seem to be working hard to get attention in the local paper and they do a lot locally but is that education?"

This is answered by one resident who comments

"We are extremely fortunate in having only one school, it cuts out the competition. The school achieves a very high standard, not just in academic things but also in fencing, sport, debating and music. There is something about it in the local paper every week and the children do take a big part in the town's activities." (Resident). Management of reputation is seen as a priority for the senior management of the school.

"We know that our future depends on doing well and we are now seeing the effects of getting the best A level results in the county - numbers are on the up and the use of Radio Rural helped us with this. If we can get the parents into the school we can win because the kids look pretty good and behave well generally - its a matter of

getting them over the doorstep" (Deputy Head).

The problems which the school faces are summed up in two interview comments.

"I have only recently moved into the area. My children are going to Mercers because I have heard bad things about the local comp. My neighbour says I would be wasting my time going to see." (Parent, Mercers).

"I attended there when it was a sec. mod. and things can't change that much because they have still got a lot of the old staff and they use the same buildings...it is full of bad memories for me" (Parent, St. Mary's).

The local grapevine has not been helped by teachers who have not assumed the shared values of the new school.

"I would have gone to look at the school but two of the teachers there said it wasn't the place for a bright and sensitive child so I looked at Deacons who make a point of their Christian environment". (Parent, Deacons).

There could not be better evidence to support Williams (1989) view that

"the reality is that every teacher, as well as every pupil, is personally responsible for community perceptions of the school" (p.154). The senior management

team are well aware of the problems and are building on the opinion of those who have been successful at the school using comments in publicity materials and in their visits to primary schools.

"We have great confidence inn the school ...we feel it should be supported in the locality, after all it couldn't afford to be too progressive.....they have been good in letting us know about progress.....the subjects are as good as those elsewhere, including Mercers.....the boys have been with their friends from primary school and they are happy because they know they have to toe the line.. reputation is improving" (Parent Years 7,9,13).

#### Performance Indicators

Intake figures indicate a steady rise in ability level since 1978. The group taking GCSE in 1990 showed a normal distribution with 14 of 70-80 VRQ and 23 above 120. GCSE results are above the County average with Advanced level passes at 92% "topping the league" (Head). 27% gained at least 5 GCSE A-C grades (County average 25.2%), and 73.5% gained at least one higher grade (County average 62.8%). The score per student in the year group was 25.4, a

reflection of the full ability range and the existence of a "top set" of 28 with a VRQ of above 120 on entry five years previously. The school has a good reputation for numbers moving to further and higher education. In 1990 27 of a year 13 of 48 went to degree courses. From year 11 42% continued into the Sixth Form, 28% to Technical or Sixth Form College, 17% to training schemes (reflecting the local confidence in work experience placement), and 7% to paid employment. There was formerly some concern at the number of juveniles involved in court cases but" these have dropped significantly in the past three years". At the same time attendance rates have improved and achieved 93% during the Spring term 1991. The school is proud of the programme of activities with some 300 sports fixtures, two plays and a concert and the hosting of two major sixth form conferences each year.

### Conclusion

This is a school which has done much to establish its credibility in the area when faced with the long term effects of reorganisation and extreme competition for the most able children and the attention of the more affluent parents in the extensive catchment area. Interviews with



leavers suggest that it is a happy school, one where the individual is known and where flexibility in teaching approaches allows for individual development. At the same time there is some bitterness that the system perpetuates ability banding for the lower achievers. There are also comments about the disparity in teaching ability, care for the individual and concentration on work shown by individual members of staff. In short, the school has still not presented itself as consistently good to all stakeholders. The scoring by respondents is within the middle range, as too are the number of descriptors evidenced for each criteria used. The only marked mismatch is for pupil appearance where the efforts of the school are greater than the stakeholder response would suggest.

## 5. HOLMLEIGH SCHOOL

### Background

This 11-18 comprehensive school was established in 1972 on a greenfield site in the middle of a large housing complex three miles from the centre of a large industrial

county town. There are 1100 students including a sixth form of 160 which is forecast to grow rapidly following the successful development of one and two year pre-vocational courses. Seven of the current staff were appointed to the school when it opened including the Head who succeeded the first head four years ago. Staff turnover is low although there has been an increase of numbers of staff as the school has grown and one of the community interviewees spoke of the way in which the "staff seem to be a team working in the area for a long time". The overall staff ratio is 1:15.9 including 1.0 additional staff for a small unit for students with specific learning difficulties.

#### Environment

The school occupies a compact site as a single block in the midst of 22 acres of playing fields. It was designed as a community school and has no obvious boundaries being approached from parkland on one side and from a shopping, library, and health complex on the other. The interior of the building has been recently refurbished and considerable areas have been given sound absorbing flooring as an antidote to the low ceilings. There are

problems with the maintenance of the surroundings because of community access to the sports hall, swimming pool, youth and evening class facilities but any graffiti is immediately removed as part of a policy agreed with the joint users of the facilities. There is concern that the recent increase in sixth form numbers is to be met by the provision of six temporary classrooms to be situated behind the school buildings. These may be vulnerable to vandalism when the school is not in session.

### Recruitment

The school was originally intended to provide a single unit serving three adjoining housing estates, one council and two owner occupied. Political pressures from a group of residents on one of the estates resulted in some students moving to selective schools serving another part of the city but this practice has declined of late "mainly as a result of both our success and the range of subjects we can offer which is superior to that on offer in a two form situation" (Deputy Head).

The intake is described as "weighted towards the low average with few of VRQ above 120". There has been an

increase in applications for places from throughout the city area as a result of the publicity recently given to a range of curriculum developments. There was oversubscription of 28% in 1991.

The designated catchment area is within an area of 6% unemployment. There have been considerable social problems in some parts of the catchment area and a notable increase in re-possession of cheaper private housing in the past year. Staff speak of the additional time taken with home visits and crisis counselling which they see as part of their community role.

"We know we do more than many schools but with the head and two deputies as well as seven staff living in the area we are always on call and need to be so if we are doing the best we can for the youngsters." (Head of Year).

14% of the students are eligible for free meals. There is a flexible uniform policy with the tie being the only mandatory purchase from suppliers.

### Data

This was collected in the Spring and Summer terms 1991. Only 22 interviews were completed at the time of the



Table 8

Holmleigh

Respondents	Entry	Leavers	Community	Total	Staff	Descriptors
Process Factors						
Work emphasis	68.1	41.3	90.4	63.8	40	2
Teaching methods	72.7	55.1	85.7	69.4	40	3
Special facilities	63.6	93.1	100	86.1	40	3
Teaching staff help	63.6	48.2	71.4	61.1	60	3
Caring approach	68.1	44.5	85.7	63.8	80	3
Reports on pupils	77.2	75.8	90.4	86.5	50	3
Parental contact	68.1	58.6	85.7	69.4	70	4
Clear rules	59	68.9	71.4	66.6	40	2
Behaviour expectatns	77.2	44.5	71.4	62.5	60	2
Product Factors						
No. to further educa	18.1	24.1	52.3	30.5	10	3
Examination results	50	37.9	76.1	52.7	30	3
Pupil appearance	40.9	58.6	71.4	56.9	20	2
No. of respondents	22	29	21	72	10	
No. of responses	190	160	200	550	54	
No. ticking all	0	0	6	6	0	
Responses / return	8.6	5.5	9.5	7.7	5.4	
% respondents with other children at the School					74.4	
% respondents attending School in the past					18.6	
% respondents attending evening activities at the School					23.2	
% respondents talking about the School at work					43	
% respondents talking about the School at social events					45.8	
% respondents talking about School with neighbours					69.4	

Descriptors, to a maximum of 4, observed for each criterion - see Fig.3

survey but these include a good range of community members. The school used the opportunity to gather additional material about community perceptions and this was made available in writing these findings. The data is presented in Table 8. Many parents on entry and community respondents ticked a large number of the listed features as strengths of the school. This contrasted sharply with the perceptions of leavers. The high number of community respondents ticking all features as strengths was investigated further and may be explained by the view "We have always thought that it is "our" school and there is such a good relationship between school and community so it is natural that it should be given good ratings" (Resident and dinner assistant). It may be that the comment is also a reflection on methodological weakness in that views were sought only on whether a feature was, or was not, a strength; there was no provision for a qualified response.

#### Parents on entry (Year 7)

There is a close tie between the school and three of the feeder primary schools. Otherwise brochures are made

available only on application to the school. All prospective parents are invited to see the school at an open evening. Whilst no feature was rated as an outstanding strength there was high rating for teaching methods, behaviour and expectations, and the reporting system. Work emphasis, a caring approach and parental contact are also seen as strengths by parents.

Indicative comments include,

"We know that it is a school which cares - they always involve the parents if things go wrong". (Parent Year 7,9)

"It has got a good name for following up problems, the staff are able to help and the Head is always there". (Parent Year 7,10)

"The examination results aren't the best in the county but the way in which they look after the kids is second to none". (Parent Year 7).

The very high proportion of respondents with other children in the school and with previous attendance as students may explain the concentration on the "human side" of school life.

"The boss stresses that we are a people's organisation". (Standard scale teacher).

## Leavers

This group rate fewer features as strengths and in so doing show a more critical view of the school. Although the facilities are rated very highly and the reporting system is seen as a strength by 75.8% most other features are rated as strengths by less than half of the respondents. Although more note the numbers moving on to further and higher education as a strength than in the parent group it is still a low figure at 24.1%,

"but they don't make much of what happens when you leave school providing that you know what you are going to do" (Leaver Year 11).

Reaction to their life in the school had been the subject of social education and tutorial consideration "because we want to know what the experience means to the clients" ( Social Education Co-ordinator). It is possible that this had led to greater criticism especially in matters of "what is said compared with what is done". This is shown in the understanding of clear rules but a 25% lower rating for behaviour. The leavers are also critical of matters associated with work and achievement.



"I have been happy here but I don't think that I have ever been pushed. The results could have been much better"

(Leaver Year 13).

"Its all a bit casual - I mean there is not much pressure to get homework done, and you don't want to be a creep although the lessons are usually good". (Leaver Year 11)

"Its a good school with good equipment especially in the sports area and in music and drama but the pressure isn't put on you to work as long as you are happy at the school." (Leaver Year 13).

#### Community

The community has a very positive view of the school with all features, except numbers going to higher education scoring over 70% as strengths. The reasons for this may be related to the fact that it is a known experience - 23.2% of the respondents overall attend classes of one sort or another on the premises. Discussion with the community co-ordinator suggests that the high profile of the school on the estates may be related to the joint activities such as the annual "Dawn Run" to a local

beauty spot in aid of charity, bingo sessions, student participation in local community activities and with volunteer care groups, the use of community members for social education contacts and the readiness of the school to accommodate organisations at a low hiring rate compensated for by commercial letting to trade fairs. The students cannot be hidden as they pass the estate centre to and from school

"They have learnt to behave themselves and we know that a call will get Tony (head) out on patrol. The staff are genuine about wanting to help with the kids out of school providing that the community is reasonable in its demands" (Community worker).

"The great thing is that Tony and Bob (deputy head) have been at the school for a long while and they drink at the same pub as the rest of us so that's where we know we can get hold of them. It makes such a difference having them live with the families they are here to serve".  
(Shopkeeper).

The community has high expectations of the school as provider and facilitator and interview evidence stresses the open communications and sense of ownership which

exists.

### Total response

By balancing the enthusiasm of the community and the more critical view of the leavers the total response is indicative of a general level of satisfaction with the school and what it has to offer. Facilities and reports are highly rated overall but numbers going to further education are not seen as a strength, possibly because there is no attempt to communicate this information. All process factors are rated more highly than any of the outcomes. This possibly reflects the strong emphasis on community involvement in "our" school and the outcomes may be taken for granted.

### Staff

17% of the staff provided responses. A protracted period of self evaluation and the onset of a two year period of "paired reviews" by the lea advisors has affected staff. Lower numbers seeing strengths associated with teaching and achievement suggest real concern which is echoed in staff interviews.

"It is a lovely school to be in with a real feeling of

community but I think we spend too much of the time on living together and too little on hard academic grind".

"If it is a toss up between an activity and missed lessons it is always the lessons which suffer because the philosophy is that we should extend the kids' experience"

"The real achievements like the French Market on T.V. and the Art in the Community prize reflect glory on the school but do very little for either results or behaviour - we may attract a few in the short term but in the long run its results which count". (Staff interviews)

#### Forming Community Opinion

The school is unique in the sample investigated because it is a true community school. Within its immediate area it is known and valued as a complex of facilities, a meeting place and as a catalyst for community activity.

"They do so much to work with the local community even going out to the college of agriculture and working with the design sections of local industry - its obvious that the school will get known and because the youngsters are keen the school gets a good name". (Governor)

Although the number of respondents talking about the school at work or social events is just over 40% in each



case, 69.4% talk about the school with neighbours. The amount of personal involvement, shown by the high numbers with other children at the school, the numbers attending evening activities and nearly 20% who had previously attended the school, provides a basis for an effective local grapevine. However, the estates are maturing and local numbers are starting to fall. In consequence the school is more aggressive in its recruitment and is now ready to provide a liaison link with any primary school which has requested information, or which has provided recruits to Holmleigh. New, brightly coloured brochures have been designed, a house style developed and a system whereby any caller is invited to the school to be met by a senior member of staff has been put in place. This has not yet resolved the fundamental tension between those staff who feel that there should be greater concentration on formality and on academic strength, and those who favour the "total experience" philosophy but there is some determination that

"we are a school for the average youngster, the academic high fliers can still go to the grammar schools. We are

here to serve the needs of young people growing up as part of society and we have to show them how to get on, how to occupy themselves properly and how to make the most of their own capabilities. There are a lot of parents who rank all that above the results and the rigidity of uniform and we might do well to attract them" (Head, on recruitment strategy).

This philosophy explains much of the balance between school and the community it works within. At the same time there is shared pleasure at the achievements of all sections of the school and a publicity officer ensures city wide coverage. There are some who argue that it is a good school because it

"keeps a balance between the academic and the development of the kids as people and we know that they get their fair share to university, high numbers into jobs and have a reputation for the ability to work in a mature way" (Parent of leaver year 13).

#### Performance Indicators

Although designated as comprehensive the school loses some 5% of its designated catchment to the grammar

schools. As a result the intake reaching GCSE in 1991 shows a normal distribution between 70 and 120 VRQ but has very little above that level. At Advanced level there was a 72% pass rate in 1990, well below the county average for 11-18 schools but reflecting the nature of the intake. At GCSE level 20% gained more than 5 GCSE A-C grades (County average 27%) and 61% gained at least one higher grade pass. (County average 68%). The score for the fifth year cohort was 24.7 per student showing that many in the middle and lower ability groups achieved well.

In 1991 52% of the year 11 students moved into the sixth form. A further 12% went to the Technical College. 22% began work on training schemes and 7% are beginning paid employment. The remaining 75 were still seeking placement in September. There has been a decrease in the number of court appearances over the past five years dropping from "over twenty" to "less than five", and in the same period the attendance rate has improved from 88% to 93% in the Spring term. There is immediate action if a pattern of non-attendance is shown by any student and the education welfare officer is available as a confidential counsellor

on request by any student.

### Conclusion

This school is one which is highly rated by the parents and community groups but less so by the leavers. Facilities are modern and in good condition, there is a strong staff loyalty to the school and there are structures which ensure that school and community work together. Staff interviews highlight tension over the way in which the school should be developing emphasis on work and examination results in order to continue to attract in a highly competitive situation but the debate has not affected community views of the school. Despite the views of leavers, the networks and staff attitudes are such that it is a caring school but it may be that much staff time is taken with a few students. There is a sense of relaxed order, an attempt for all students to know and be known by at least some of the staff and a welcome to all users of the premises as part of a "cradle to grave " philosophy of a community school serving a well defined area. There may be differences of detail between perceived strength and the reality of school experience



but overall the stakeholders appear to have realistic knowledge of their local school. The exception is that there is a school awareness of the need to promote further education, which appears not to be understood by parents or leavers.

## 6. ALBERMARLE SCHOOL

### Background

The school was established in 1960 as a grammar school to serve the suburban belt on the fringe of an industrial county town. It became comprehensive in 1974 with an increase to the existing staff and a re-definition of catchment area. Over 20% of the staff have been in post since that time and of these three staff were formerly on the grammar school staff. There have been two heads since the reorganisation and the present head has been in post for three years. The sixth form of 170 has a more generous staffing ratio and so in a school of 1100 students the overall ratio is 1:15.6. There is a learning support unit funded from within this staffing.

### Environment

The 1960 buildings were added to in the period 1972-4 and again in 1986-8 and spread across a level, but elevated,

site in 13 acres of playing fields bounded by a main railway line on one side and by owner occupied "quality" housing which has grown from a village nucleus on the other two sides. In local parlance it is the school on "the right side of the tracks". It suffers from cramped corridors and stairways and is tiled throughout. The head has now negotiated a rolling redecoration programme but the building does show signs of heavy wear. It is used extensively by adult education classes which until 1990 were organised by the l.e.a., but since that time it has become a school responsibility.

#### Recruitment

Students are drawn from four suburban "villages" the largest of which has over 8,000 population including a large army barracks. In 1990, the first year of full open enrolment, it attracted 246 applicants for 180 places drawing from adjoining rural areas, served by 11-16 schools, and from the remaining areas of the inner city where the selective system continues. The school intake has 65% of the current year 7 with a VRQ above 100. There are twelve pupils in that year with a VRQ below 85.

Transport to the site is possible by one public 'bus route but 20% of the year 7 entry in 1991 are reliant on parental transport. The immediate catchment area is prosperous with most inhabitants working in the city. There is a large council estate and a large area of army accommodation to the north of the area. Most of this area is served by a similar school which was established as a purpose built comprehensive in 1974, but an increasing number of "officers' children" are now seeking entry. Unemployment in the local area is low, at 4% but there have been many redundancies with major employers in the defence industry and this may well rise. Current pressures for places at Albermarle are believed to be related to an increase in numbers of parents now unable to pay for independent education in the city and in another town six miles distant. Free meals are taken by 8% of the school. There is a full uniform requirement with specified colours from named suppliers. This includes a blazer for all students.

#### Data

This was collected in the summer term of 1991. Interviews were arranged at the school and included students,

Table 9

## Albermarle

Respondents	Entry	Leavers	Community	Total	Staff	Descriptors
Process Factors						
Work emphasis	60	21.4	16.6	39.2	87.5	4
Teaching methods	64	42.8	0	43.1	37.5	3
Special facilities	72	71.4	33	62.7	12.5	3
Teaching staff help	48	57.1	41.6	49.6	62.5	3
Caring approach	72	21.4	25	47	56	2
Reports on pupils	88	35.7	16.6	56.8	50	2
Parental contact	60	35.7	16.6	43.1	25	3
Clear rules	80	50	33	60.7	25	3
Behaviour expectatns	92	35.7	41.6	64.7	75	4
Product Factors						
No. to further educa	40	71.4	41.6	49	50	3
Examination results	68	71.4	50	64.7	100	4
Pupil appearance	88	71.4	33	70.5	50	4
No. of respondents	25	28	24	77	8	
No. of responses	208	164	84	456	50	
No. ticking all	0	0	0	0	0	
Responses / return	8.3	5.8	3.5	5.9	6.4	
% respondents with other children at the School					74.4	
% respondents attending School in the past					18.6	
% respondents attending evening activities at the School					23.2	
% respondents talking about the School at work					43	
% respondents talking about the School at social events					45.8	
% respondents talking about School with neighbours					69.4	

Descriptors, to a maximum of 4, observed for each criterion - see Fig.3



community users of the premises, governors and local residents. Three quarters of respondents had had other children at the school, one fifth attended the school themselves and a quarter attended evening activities at the school. The school is thus well known to the respondents. The data is presented as Table 9.

Parents on entry (Year 7)

The reputation of the school is related to behaviour and expectations, and pupil appearance. By the time of completion of the questionnaires the parents had received a very detailed coloured handbook and had attended an open evening where the uniform requirements had been demonstrated. At that meeting the move to profile reporting had also been explained and is also understood as a feature of the school. One parent commented, however,

"Children have to be kept in their place if they are to get on - it is a lesson they have to learn and the school seems to insist on standards. I don't like these new reports though, how can the children and the staff negotiate a comment? The one advantage is that the

teachers have to know the child better". (Parent, ex-student).

The parents recognise the special facilities of the school as a strength and also rate the caring approach more highly than in some of the schools investigated. This may be explained by the considerable liaison between the school and its main feeder primaries where some teacher exchange, work with the children before transfer and 5-16 curricular coherence work has been undertaken by the head of year 7 and the learning support co-ordinator who commented that

"If we involve the parents of those with difficulties at an early stage they see us as the natural school for their children, and we benefit because they are not new problems when they come to us".

The lower ratings for teaching staff help were investigated in interviews and it seems that this arose from a comment made by the head at a preliminary meeting that the aim of the school is to teach students to be responsible for their own learning. There may also be some relationship to the streamed teaching groups used throughout the school from the start of year 7 as stated

by one parent

"You want to help the youngster yourself because you don't want her to have to ask in case the teachers think that she can't cope and then move her to another group".

Awareness of the problems of an inflexible system is shown in interview comments. As an advantage,

"I have no doubt why I chose the school. It is because it is the only one which streams on ability from the word go and so they aren't waiting for the less bright to catch them up". (Parent, city area) Conversely,

"The system is no better than the old grammar and secondary modern system under the same roof. I really think that I have made a mistake because he is beginning to feel that he is no good". (Parent, local resident).

All other listed features are given moderate ratings except for the numbers going to further education which, although seen as a strength by only 40% of the respondents, is much higher than in many of the schools investigated.

### Leavers

This group give a much wider range of responses. The

strengths, seen as a result of their own experience, are in the facilities available, the examination results, pupil appearance and the numbers going to further education. All these are based on their perceptions of the school compared with its close neighbour.

"The great strength of this school is that it gets results - you have to get down to work if you want to succeed and you can get help if you need it. This means that we do become self reliant". (Leaver Year 13).

Of the three groups , this is the one which rates teaching staff help most highly. There is a marked contrast between this and the low ratings for work emphasis and a caring approach. The inclusion of a group of year 11 leavers may have affected this response. As one commented

"You are alright if you are bright. The school has got a name for results but the uniform doesn't hide the fact that we aren't all the same. I haven't done so well because I don't want to ask". (Leaver Year 11)

Interviews showed that there was considerable variation in tutorial activity between groups and that there was resentment about the barriers imposed by respect for



staff. There was a plaintive comment from one interviewee "Why do they keep the barriers up the whole time - there are good teachers but if they are friendly to you other staff criticise them " (Leaver Year 11)

There was, once again, some tension between perceptions of clear rules and actual behaviour. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there are some teachers who are prepared to let misbehaviour pass unchecked amongst the less able "providing we are wearing the right uniform". (Student Year 10).

### Community

The fall in the number of positive responses from members of the community was investigated by interview. It may be that the respondents were drawn from an area which was wider than that of the school neighbourhood and consequently strengths were seen "in the things we know" (local shopkeeper). Although scoring low, the strengths were seen to be in examination results, teaching staff help, behaviour and expectations and numbers to further education. The results and destinations are published in the local press and would be known because of this but

the teaching staff help was known because

"They live in the area and we know them as local people. They are helpful and have a pride in the school".

Both head and one deputy live in the area and are committed to a wide range of community activities with the musical facilities and recording studio of the school being made available to local groups. Clear rules and pupil appearance are seen as strengths by one third of respondents. In interview one resident who is also a governor commented

"the school has got so much going for it and seems to attract a nicer type of child but it has become more difficult since the school went comprehensive ....the staff aren't getting the response they used to ."

Work emphasis, parental contact, caring approach and the reporting system are only recognised by a small percentage of respondents and it may be that this is because of a feeling expressed by one resident

"We know what they expect for uniform and behaviour and we know that they get good results - that is how people judge a school. The way that the school achieves it doesn't need to be known to the world outside."

(Resident, house backing on to school).

To ascertain the reasons for the comparatively low response rate in the community further interviews were undertaken. These showed a feeling that although the school was good it had developed a type of student who showed "that they felt they had arrived, their superiority bordered on the arrogant, almost as if they were better than the children who go to Chapeltown".

•  
(Shopkeeper serving students en route to both schools).

This was expressed by another local resident who said, "They are nice kids, no trouble but they don't seem to notice that there are others in the world".

The need for some greater community awareness has been seen as major requirement of a newly negotiated tutorial programme throughout the school.

#### Total response

The response levels from all three groups were the lowest of the seven schools investigated. There was also a decline in the strengths perceived from parents on entry to leavers and the community. It may be that the school is so well accepted for what it achieves that it

does not become a matter for comment. It has been reorganised for nearly twenty years. The arrival of a new head has been the subject of discussion because he has done much to break some of the elitist practices of the school in consequence of which one leaver commented

"It used to be a school where you did as you were told, where the prefects were totally supported and where there was real emphasis on academic achievement. Recently it has become too concerned with the rights of individual people - it needs more strength at the top again".

It is possible that the changed philosophy has not been well received by the school or in the community and it is only the new parents who are prepared to accept it as a basis for success. Overall the outcomes of examination results and pupil appearance are rated more highly than any of the process factors of school experience.

### Staff

Responses were given by eight staff. This was 12% of the total. All saw examination results as a strength and most rated work emphasis and behaviour and expectations highly. There was low rating for special facilities in a crowded school and both science and technology staff



spoke of their bitterness at expenditure on the performing arts when their national curriculum teaching was impaired by failure to provide resources to allow all lessons to be taken in specialist rooms. Low ratings were given for parental contact and clear rules both of which had been identified as in need of changed practices by an l.e.a. review team. As in other investigations there was only moderate rating for those features which had been the subject of recent staff discussion. Amongst these were the new reporting system which had been introduced to year 7, the role of the tutor and the relaxation of some of the demands for uniform especially at sixth form level.

#### Forming Community Opinion

There is close liaison with the associated primary schools and the school has made brochures available throughout the libraries in the area. It has maintained press coverage of all events and has a tradition of an annual concert in the cathedral, an annual musical production and an annual drama presentation. All run for several nights to ensure that audience demand can be met.

There is a record of achievement in sport with independent school fixtures highlighted in press reports. " The school has built its reputation on its old grammar school tradition...you know of the activities...they are intended to help all students to do something which extends them outside the highly important academic work for which we have such a good reputation." (Governor, former parent of grammar school pupil).

Community activities have been encouraged and where there is room adults are welcomed to sixth form classes. Many local groups use the school as a meeting place and lettings income from the hall is increasing. There is a staff view that there must now be more concentration on the establishment of a new identity because, although recruitment is good, the school has not kept in step with developments in social education, utilising the opportunities provided by the community for the curriculum, or in individualised learning. Less than half the respondents had discussed the school either at work or at social events but 70% had done so with neighbours. This may explain the way in which the number of entrants is now spreading into the catchment of the neighbouring

school despite an agreement between the two schools to "respect our territories where possible". (Deputy Head)

#### Performance Indicators

At Advanced level the pass rate was 83% slightly above the county average rate for 11-18 schools but reckoned to be "lower than we should be achieving" (Head). The results for a year 11 group of 200 show all students attempting at least five subjects in GCSE. There was an overall achievement of 45% with more than 5 A-C grades per pupil and a 78% rate with at least one A-C grade. This compares with county figures of 27%, and 68% respectively. The points score per student in Year 11 is 31.1, the highest of the seven schools investigated. The further education destinations show 61 going on to degree courses from a Year 13 of 71 students. From Year 11 62% remained into the sixth form, 22% went to technical college, and the remainder to "employment, usually on a training scheme". (Head of Careers). There have been two exclusions in the past year and two juvenile court cases. The attendance rate was 95% during the Spring Term 1991.

### Conclusion

This is a school which is seen to be doing well by the traditional indicators of examination achievement, student appearance and expectations, and student placement at the end of schooling. The stakeholders rate it highly and although the survey results suggest low ratings for many characteristics, there is a respect for the school amongst parents, leavers and the community. The reality is shown in its development plan for the coming three years which shows staff concern at the "totality" of educational experience for all students.

Following Gray (1990), and his thesis that there is a relationship between school success and student happiness at school, the quality of school life survey showed 87% of Year 10 enjoyed most of the teaching they experienced, 70% were happy at school, 93% felt that the teachers "mostly" got the best out of them and 70% said that they "mostly" got on with teachers. With 72% describing their relationship to the school as that of "friends or good friends" and 89% believing that there was "mostly" mutual understanding between staff and students it is possible



that the experience is much more positive than the survey of strengths suggests. Comparing the evidence of descriptors with criteria ratings the mismatch occurs in understanding of work emphasis, teaching methods, reports on pupils and numbers to further education in all of which school policies are more strongly developed than opinion suggests. In all other features there is comparability.

## 7. CHARFORD SCHOOL

### Background

This is a 13 -18 upper school with a roll of 990 including a sixth form of 180. It was formerly the secondary modern school serving a town of 13,000 on the suburban fringe of a large conurbation. It became a comprehensive upper school with three defined feeder middle schools in 1978. The staff were re-appointed to redesignated posts when the new school came into being. The head, then a deputy head, had already been in the secondary modern school for three years and four other staff had also served in the old school. New staff appointments were made to meet the increased numbers and

because the more generous ratio for sixth form staffing operated in the period 1980 - 84. One quarter of the staff have been in post for more than ten years. The current ratio is 1:15.8.

### Environment

The school occupies a limited site with only eight acres of playing fields next to a major independent school and facing on to an extensive council estate. The buildings are distinctive having won architectural awards for layout and finish and there have been three matching extensions over the past fifteen years. The buildings overlook a millpond site and have been attractively landscaped so that the facilities are much in demand for lettings. There is considerable community use of the premises and arrangements are in hand to transfer the management of these from an l.e.a. co-ordinator to the school management structure. The buildings have a minimum maintenance internal finish. Corridor areas have been minimised by a layout around three interconnecting quadrangles. The problem is that these create a wind tunnel effect and there is considerable difficulty in

keeping the site litter free.

### Recruitment

The current year 9 came from an intake with a distribution which is skewed towards the upper end of the ability range with 55% of the students over 100 VRQ, 22% above 120 VRQ and only 10% below 90 VRQ. The school served the southern area of the town together with the rural fringe until 1989. Since that time open enrolment has led to recruitment from throughout the area including the catchment of the former grammar school. Some 15% of parents are responsible for transport from out of area locations within the conurbation and the school has developed a particularly high reputation in an area which would otherwise feed into city schools. Whilst the unemployment rate in the town is currently 6% there have been redundancies in the main manufacturing industry and there is evidence of increased distress because of repossession of houses and pending unemployment. One feature has been an increase in numbers transferring from the independent school as local middle class parents are unable to sustain fee payments. Some 6% of students are entitled to free meals. There is a rigid uniform policy

Table 10                      Survey Results              Charford

Respondents	Entry	Leavers	Community	Total	Staff	Descriptors
Process Factors						
Work emphasis	64.7	14.2	49.9	41.0	40.0	4
Teaching methods	58.8	38.0	77.7	57.1	70.0	2
Special facilities	76.4	66.6	83.3	74.9	80.0	4
Teaching staff help	47.0	42.8	49.9	46.4	70.0	2
Caring approach	58.8	14.2	55.5	41.0	40.0	2
Reports on pupils	58.8	52.3	66.6	58.9	40.0	2
Parental contact	35.2	47.6	55.5	46.4	50.0	2
Clear rules	76.4	61.9	44.4	60.7	90.0	3
Behaviour expectatns	88.2	76.7	88.8	83.9	80.0	4
Product Factors						
No. to further educa	29.4	52.3	77.7	53.5	80.0	4
Exam results	70.5	95.2	99.9	89.0	100	4
Pupil appearance	88.2	71.4	83.3	80.3	100.0	4
No. of respondents	17	21	18	56	10	
No. of responses	128	133	150	411	84	
No. ticking all			1	1	2	
Responses / return	7.5	6.3	8.3	7.3	8.4	
% respondents with other children at School						79
% respondents attending School in the past						12
% respondents attending evening activities at the School						0
% respondents talking about School at work						68
% respondents talking about School at social events						53
% respondents talking about School with neighbours						74

Descriptors, to a maximum of 4, observed for each criterion



with blazers worn by all students. Items have to be purchased at two local suppliers. There is a support fund for parents in difficulty.

#### Data

The material for this case study was collected in the summer and autumn of 1990 and in subsequent interviews with staff, students, local residents and governors. This was the pilot survey and numbers responding are comparatively low. The response rate of perceived strengths per return is high overall. The percentage of respondents with other children in the school is exceptionally high at 79% but the percentage who attended the school in the past is low. There were no respondents who attended evening activities at the school. The comments of the respondents and those interviewed suggest that the school is well known to them. The findings are presented as Table 10.

#### Parents on Entry (Year 9)

Liaison arrangements are such that it is the expectation that all students at the three middle schools will move to Charford and only two did not do so in 1990. Brochures

are available in all schools from which students have been recruited in the past and new arrangements are operating to provide a link with the primary schools in the area of the city from which students are increasingly coming to Charford despite the problems associated with moving from 11-18 schools at the commencement of Year 9. Brochures are desk top published at the school. Parents and students are invited to an annual presentation evening which has considerable impact on potential parents. One commented

"We knew all about the school but went to the evening in case it made a difference getting our son into the place. It was spectacular in the way in which they showed what they were doing...lights, music, the lot....one or two were put off because it was a bit over the top".The strengths of the school were rated as high behaviour and expectations, and pupil appearance. The clear rules and special facilities were also rated highly. All these could have been judged on the visit to the school but interview evidence indicates this also depended on the local reputation grapevine.

"I look at the kids and compare them with Redbrook where

although they have a similar uniform there is less emphasis on what they can and can't do. They are not allowed into town at lunch time and the Head makes visits to the High St. at times throughout the week so they know they are being watched". (Parent Year 9 and 11)

There are lower ratings for work emphasis, teaching methods, the caring approach and reports provided on pupils. It is possible that these are taken for granted because one parent commented

"Its all about discipline. If they have got that right, and they have, then everything else follows." (Parent Year10) but it is also possible that the school emphasises its outcomes rather than the process by which students learn. Parental contact is rated low as a strength and may be related to the age of entry. One member of staff commented

"We only have the students for three years and many parents feel that once they have started the GCSE course their time is nearly over...we only have an annual evening for each group and they are pretty chaotic". The numbers to further education are not seen as a strength

by parents on entry but this may be because it does not appear in publicity material.

### Leavers

The survey results and interviews suggest that whilst this group give a high rating to examination results as a strength of the school they are much more critical than the parents of the way in which these are achieved. The facilities were seen to be good, but one student commented

"It isn't all to do with Information Tech. and computers....sometimes we need to think about the lack of facilities in the things which help you as a person. I think the Head measures everything in the number of machines we have". (Year 13) This may be related to the very low response given for caring approach as substantiated by other interviews with leavers. The school has a strong systems base with procedures for all elements of the organisation documented and published in student and staff handbooks but leavers commented

"They are good on making records of things but if you are in difficulty they aren't that keen to help with personal things". (Leaver Year 11)



"The school is so full of rules about how we do things but it is really difficult to say that there is any one member of staff that I feel close enough to to talk about any problems, and that includes work." (Leaver Year 13).

This may explain the low rating for teaching staff help particularly with the Year 13 leavers. Staff admit that their methods up to Year 11 are to

"do all that we can to get them good marks in GCSE and that includes playing the system but at A level although we get the passes the grades are not as high as they should be. We have to help the students to stand on their own feet and that is a difficult transition to make - they feel unsupported". (Head of major department).

There is also a low rating for work emphasis as a strength of the school and this was explained by one interviewee in the following way

"the examination results are all that matters and so we never think that we might be under pressure to work - you can't get the results unless you do and that is the end of it". (Leaver Year 13).

Parental contact is seen as more of a strength at this

stage and is possibly related to two further opportunities for annual meetings by the end of Year 13. Numbers going to further education and the reporting system are acknowledged as strengths by just over half the students. It may be that the details are more widely known as students prepare to leave school. Behaviour and expectations and pupil appearance are ranked highly. Clear rules are rated less highly and it appears that the essentially pragmatic approach which is taken by the senior management of the school leads to changes of policy as one leaver commented

"We were able to wear an ear ring, and then that was stopped, so there was a fuss and we were then allowed a stud, and then we were told that all jewellery was to be banned and then there was a suspension and then we went back to an ear ring." (Leaver, boy Year 11).

#### Community

The community respondents also rated examination results very highly and one commented

"Charford and Redbrook publish their results in the local paper and it is quite a game to see who is doing best each year". (Resident, Charford area).

Behaviour and expectations, and pupil appearance are also seen as highly rated strengths. This may be explained by the reputation of the head as somebody who will take immediate action in the event of complaint as instanced by two local shopkeepers and the recent decision to forbid any students access to the town at lunch time. The much lower rating for clear rules appears to be caused by a lack of knowledge of how good behaviour is achieved.

One comment was

"I know the head by sight and I know some of the staff and they all do a good job but I don't know how they do it." (Resident).

The facilities of the school are well known by the many users of the premises and teaching methods and numbers to further education appear to be known by reputation because three interviewees from this group referred to the "name" that the school has gained for doing the best it can for its students. Other features are less well known but all are related as strengths by about half the respondents and the overall positive response of 8.3 perceived strengths per return is high considering the

distribution of respondents through the area of the town.

#### Total response

The positive response level is generally high. This may be explained by the high proportion of respondents with family associations with the school who are satisfied with the examination results, discipline and appearance of the students. All three groups show a lower rating for clear rules and it may be that this has occurred because of local knowledge of issues concerned with the interpretation of dress and behaviour rules. The outcome factors of examination results and pupil appearance are ranked above all other strengths of the school except the process factor of behaviour and student expectations.

#### Staff

All 10 staff respondents, 18% of the total, rate the examination results and pupil appearance as strengths of the school. Clear rules are also rated highly, in contrast to the perceptions of the other three groups and this was explained by one member of staff as follows

"We know what it is we want from the youngsters - the problem is that we don't all speak with the same voice and it takes a while for changes to appear in print".



Facilities, numbers to higher education and behaviour and expectations are all rated highly because they are part of the experience of staff who recognise that they are in a favoured school. One remarked "We really are very lucky. The head fights for every penny he can and we are expected to use it to the advantage of the kids. In their turn they know that they have to behave or face being moved on".(Standard scale teacher).

Work emphasis, a caring approach, the reporting system and parental contact have all been the subject of recent staff discussion and the perceived weakness of these features is shown by their low ratings. Current policy changes to strengthen tutorial links with students and parents have been poorly received by staff who feel that they are under pressure and the same comment is levelled at the profile reporting system recently introduced, despite much staff opposition, to year 9. There is a continuing disagreement over the approach to teaching and learning styles with a fear that students are insufficiently prepared for further study because of didactic approaches at the GCSE stage and the element of

staff newer to the school is waging a campaign for changed approaches. It is not possible to tell how much of this discussion reaches the other groups involved but the students showed an awareness of the latter issue in interviews. One commented

"We don't like so many lessons where it is all listen, take notes, listen and then we will have a test. There are some lessons where it is more practical and more fun but we know that there is so much to do if we are to get to the exam ready prepared." (Student Year 10).

#### Forming Community Links

The school has developed its own house style with some desk top publishing to provide information for all intending applicants. Liaison with the feeder schools has already been mentioned and occasional applicants are shown the school and given a personal interview with the head.

"After all we are also in competition with the independent school and they provide that level of involvement so we must do the same." (Deputy Head).

There is an awareness of competition with the other comprehensive school and this underlies concentration on

reputation as a matter of policy. This has been picked up by both parents and students with varying attitudes towards the policy. One parent commented

"They are concerned about their reputation and that keeps them on their toes". (Parent Year 7). It was seen by a student as follows

"They are more concerned about reputation than they are about individuals - appearance comes first". (Student Year 12).

Community use of premises is encouraged for financial and public relations reasons and the state of the buildings is maintained at a high level so that there is community awareness of the standards of the school. The buildings are in use most weekends and the head is frequently on the site to greet and help those who are using the premises and thus provide

"the human face of the school". (Head). Evening activities are being developed and there is a pilot scheme for adult attendance at classes in operation. However, the school only has work experience for the slower learners and the CPVE care group and the use of

the community as a basis for curriculum development has been limited. One governor explained

"We have tried to keep the emphasis on the work which produces exam results - if there is time then the other involvements can be developed but the school is under tremendous pressure". (Governor, industrialist).

There is intense local interest in educational matters with the local paper being cynically described as "the weekly school news" (Shopkeeper). The percentages of respondents talking about the school at work and with neighbours is high and over half have talked about the school at social events. One parent explained

"It is mainly about which school is best. After all we are looking for the best for our kids and the most consistently praised school must be the one you choose in the end."

#### Performance Indicators

The current Year 9 came from an intake with a distribution which is skewed towards the upper end of the ability range with 55% of students over 100 VRQ, 22% above 120 VRQ and only 10% below 90 VRQ. At Advanced level the pass rate has been consistently over 85% for



some years past and was 87.7% in 1990. There is some concern that the distribution of grades shows fewer at A and B level than the ability and GCSE results of the group would suggest. The Year 11 group achieved 56% with 5 or more GCSE A-C passes, and 100% with at least 1 higher level pass. The points average of 30.2 is high. These exceptional rates compare with County averages of 25.2%, and 62.8% respectively. From this group 58% went into the Sixth Form. A further 13% went to Technical College courses and 18% to training schemes. 7% went to paid employment and the remainder were unemployed when statistics were prepared. There are "three or four" court cases each year mainly connected with motoring offences. The sanctions system is such that short suspensions are used at an early stage and average about eight per year " so that the others know what will happen, and we aren't afraid to ask the governors to support us in saying that we can't cope". (Deputy Head). Attendance rates at 93% are a reflection of a spring and summer problem when a small number of disillusioned students "drop out" at a stage when court action to

secure attendance is not possible.

### Conclusion

This school is perceived as being successful in its examination results, numbers moving to further education and employment and all aspects of discipline. It is however, felt to lack warmth and humanity by many students. In interview one commented

"We are parts of a machine producing good results but it is sometimes a cold place to be because you don't feel that you belong - I suppose it is because we don't start until 13". (Student Year 13). This was developed further by one member of staff who said

"Education is about more than just the results and our reputation, its about coping with the kid who has got problems, not shutting the door - we just don't cope with that sort of thing." (Head of subject).

Success measured in terms of measurable outcomes may be masking the need seen by all stakeholders for there to be greater caring and support throughout the school. One parent commented

"I have noticed that she has got arrogant since she has been here and so are her friends - they have lost their concern for other people which was so well developed at the middle school. Maybe we have to face up to the fact that it is the price we pay for results" (Parent Year10). Concentration on results above all else may weaken the educational experience. Distortion in the match between perception and reality occurs because of the low ranking given by leavers for work emphasis, despite the policies implemented by staff. A similarly low perception by parents on entry affects the overall results for numbers to further education; in all other respects there is a high degree of comparability.

## CHAPTER SIX

### GENERALISATIONS FROM THE CASE STUDIES

#### Approaches to Generalisation

##### (a) Comparative use of data

Some of the methodological difficulties associated with the interpretation of case study material have been discussed in Chapter Three. Any attempt to reach some conclusions from seven different studies raises the problems outlined by Tuckman (1972) which are concerned with the nature of bias on the part of the investigator, interpretation on the part of the respondent and the environmental situation in which the investigation takes place. This leads to consideration of the theory of organisations put forward by Greenfield (1975) as the sum of the personal constructs of the individuals concerned rather than a coherent entity. These views prompted caution in attempting to draw conclusions about the way in which stakeholders in schools see the strengths of those schools.

Any attempt to give the data some quantitative significance and to draw inferences which might shed light on the way in which local opinion of a school is



developed is limited by the fact that each set of responses were given in response to the known factors in each environment - and the environments differed markedly. Thus, although examination results were only seen as a strength of Vale School by less than half the respondents they are actually good given the nature of the intake. There is concern at Charford where the examination results are rated as the greatest strength of the school, because, given the nature of the intake, the results if measured in terms of Advanced level A-C passes are only average for the county. Such reservations inhibit generalisations.

Further, there has been no attempt to investigate the causality of factors in this investigation. A defined strength cannot be either the cause of success in a school or mathematically linked to favourable judgement although it may influence opinion. The relationship between what stakeholders believe and the reality of school achievement cannot be measured because of the high degree of subjectivity in those factors which make for school effectiveness. This can be demonstrated by

applying the Gray and Nicholl (1982) concept of "tone", as the summation of all those factors which influence public perception of what a school is attempting to do, to the case study schools. Albert School has high standards of building maintenance, decoration, displays, pupil control and appearance but none of these features are currently measurable in a way which might convince the community at large of the school's success. However, it is possible to note the coincidence of perceived success and actual achievement in descriptive terms, particularly in interviews when respondents exemplify the points they are making. As one Charford parent commented "We looked at the two schools and both were making a good job of what they had to sell. For me the thing which swung my opinion was that we were walking round the buildings when one of the staff greeted us and asked us into his craft room to see them at work - that was very welcoming".

Two further methodological difficulties inhibit comparison. Despite care in the administration of the questionnaire in schools, and in the issue of the questionnaire to members of the community as detailed in

Appendix 2 , there is evidence that some schools modified arrangements to suit local needs. This was true of Vale School where 50 leavers were used "in order to get a view from half a year group" (Deputy Head), and at Albermarle School where "we decided to use a postal distribution so that the public would see that we take the research seriously". (Deputy Head). The variation in degree of response is given in the tables by the number of respondents in each school. The lower figures for Albert School leavers and for all groups at Charford may well have distorted findings in those schools. Problems of interpretation remained, although materials were piloted. This was shown at Three Crosses School where, despite discussion with the staff about the concept of "reports on pupils" as a reference to the reporting system, one tutor told the leavers that "it is what they say about you in the town" and it is possible that this nullified comparison between group responses in the school.

#### (b) Numerical Analysis

An attempt was made to ascertain whether there was

any value in seeking some correlation between the factors ranked high or low in each school, or ranked high or low more frequently overall, with actual school effectiveness. However, as discussed in Chapter 3 multiple regression analysis and similar techniques could only be used for school based objective data which could be linked to environmental and process factors. The descriptors associated with the criteria, and used as the basis of much of the comparison between perception and reality, cannot be accorded the status of objective data. There is a double interpretation for each in the assumption that the descriptor is valid for a particular criteria, and that it does exist in such a way that it does affect school effectiveness. In this investigation respondents were simply asked to tick perceived strengths and these have not been related to any causal factors. More simply, explanations have been offered as to the way in which individual schools may be responding to the indicators which stakeholders see as important. It was also felt that there is, as yet, no way in which some quantifiable assessment could be given for the relative strength of all the features under consideration in each



Holmleigh			Albermarle			Charford			
Community	Parents	Leavers	Community	Parents	Leavers	Community	Parents	Leavers	Community

6	4	10	2	9	11	9	6	11	10
5	3	6	4	8	7	12	7	10	5
12	7	1	1	5	1	5	3	4	3
6	7	7	8	11	5	3	10	9	10
9	4	8	4	5	2	8	7	11	8
1	1	2	2	2	9	9	7	6	7
2	4	4	4	9	8	9	11	8	8
3	9	3	8	4	6	5	3	5	12
10	1	8	8	1	9	2	1	2	2

6	12	12	12	12	1	3	12	6	5
3	10	11	7	7	1	1	5	1	1
11	11	4	8	2	1	5	1	3	3

Table 11 Ranking of Strengths by Each Group in Each School

School	Castle		Albert		Vale		Three Crosses			
	Parents	Leavers	Community	Parents	Leavers	Community	Parents	Leavers		
Process factors										
Work emphasis	11	9	11	10	9	10	6	4	7	3
Teaching methods	8	3	6	3	4	6	1	11	10	6
Special facilities	3	4	8	1	1	1	1	1	6	6
Teaching staff help	9	7	4	8	3	5	9	8	5	5
Caring approach	1	11	1	3	8	4	1	8	3	8
Reports on pupils	9	5	4	3	1	9	6	5	8	1
Parental contact	6	5	2	3	4	1	6	2	3	3
Clear rules	4	7	7	8	4	1	4	7	1	10
Behaviour expectns.	2	1	7	1	8	6	9	10	1	11
Product Factors										
No. to further ed.	12	12	10	12	9	11	12	12	12	1
Examination results	6	2	3	11	9	12	11	6	11	9
Pupil appearance	4	9	9	3	4	6	4	2	8	12

school and this further precludes the use of mathematical analysis which would allow some investigation of the relationship between the outcomes and the process in each school. This research is much more descriptive and subjective and as such does not provide the data for causative analysis. (Burstein 1976)).

#### An Attempt at Comparison

Having recognised the problems of the methodology of comparison an attempt was made, however, to use the survey data for comparative purposes. The basis of this was to rank the strengths as seen by each group in each school as given in Table 11. This allowed comparison on the basis of relative rather than actual "scores" for each perceived strength and facilitated comparison between the same features in differing schools. The rankings given to each factor within, and then between, schools was considered. Where there was commonality between group responses (recognised by having the same, or one ordinal adjacent), this was noted for each school. Commonality between the ranking of all three groups of

respondents occurred once for Vale School, twice for Castle, Albert and Albermarle Schools, four times for Three Crosses and Holmleigh Schools, and five times for Charford. It may be that this indicates variation in the way in which the practices and philosophy of the schools are understood. It may also indicate the existence of public relations policies in the school, greater community involvement than in some schools and effective communications with all groups of stakeholders.

If the commonality is extended to those features with two respondent groups sharing similar ranking for each listed feature this occurs between eight times for Vale School and eleven times for Castle School. The greatest commonality is between parents and community responses with a tendency for the leavers to be out of line particularly in matters of school process including the caring atmosphere, subject teaching help and behaviour. It is difficult to explain the "wild" variation in ranking which occurs. At Castle School both parents and community rank caring atmosphere as the highest strength but the leavers rate it as eleventh; at Three Crosses the variation between the highest rating



of parents and community for the reporting system, ranked ninth by leavers, has already been commented upon. At Albermarle the difference between parent and community rankings for behaviour and expectations ranked first and second respectively, and leaver ranking placing it ninth, may be explained by the reality of classroom experience or by the way in which "the school always puts on a good front for visitors" (Leaver Year 13).

If the same form of analysis is used to look at commonality ascribed to the listed possible strengths for all schools there is similar high variation. If the occasions when all three groups have a common rating are considered this varies between never, for examination results ( with parents at variance in four of the seven schools, leavers twice, and community, once); to three times for work ethos and numbers going to further and higher education as strengths. If the common rankings for two out of the three groups are considered the lowest common feature is recognition of clear school rules as a strength which occurs only once. All seven schools having two groups in common on examination results and parental

contact as school strengths. This may indicate a consistently low consideration of some items in the given list which are actually rated as strengths by a small number of respondents in each instance. These include numbers to further and higher education, ranked lowest in four of the seven schools, and work ethos ranked lowest in four schools with a variation between fourth and eighth ranking in the fifth.

To take the possibilities of comparison further the four highest ranked features of each school were also listed. Special facilities were rated amongst these for five of the schools but not at Three Crosses and Albermarle where local campaigns for improvement have already been noted. Examination results were in the top four rankings for four schools, three of which have sixth forms. Parental contact, behaviour and expectations and reports appeared in the top four strengths of three of the schools. There was more of a tendency for the same strengths to appear in the top four rankings in the 11-18 schools with three schools having similar ranking for behaviour and expectations, examination results and pupil appearance. In the 11-16 schools the only similarity was

in the ranking for special facilities. This might provide further evidence for the contention that 11-18 schools are judged more on product or outcomes whilst the 11-16 schools are seen to have strengths in process features.

#### The Degree of Response

Comparison of the average number of positive strengths noted on each group of returns showed a greater overall consistency in parent responses of between 7.5 and 8.6 positive responses per return. This compares with a variation between 5.5 and 8.3 for leavers, and between 3.5 and 9.5 for the community respondents. This may be explained in that the source of most parental information has either been through the experience of other children at the school, or from the recruitment process which would present the strongest features of the school to parents. Leavers respond from their own experience and the community from hearsay. The environment within which the community make their responses may have some effect in that Albermarle is contrasted with the independent sector schools in the experience of many community members whereas Holmleigh is the only true community

school in the sample and this is much appreciated by its local community.

To test this assumption of experience of each school further, comparison was made of the numbers knowing each school either through having had other children at the school, attendance by one or more parents in the past, and attendance at evening activities. The two schools with caring atmosphere highly rated were the two with the highest number of respondents with other children in the school (Castle 86%, Vale 79%). There was also high ranking for special facilities in these two schools. There is some possibility that process features generally are only appreciated after the experience of one or more children in a family. Work ethos, teaching help and caring atmosphere are all in the middle rankings for Albert and Three Crosses Schools where only half of the respondents had had other children at the school. The number of respondents who had previously attended the school varied between 6% at Albert School and 19% at Three Crosses. The only relationship which can be deduced is that those with low numbers having attended the school or its predecessors have a lower rate of positive return



overall (Albert and Albermarle) whilst the two schools with highest previous attenders (Three Crosses and Holmleigh) are the two with the highest responses overall.

Evening activity attendance varies between 0% at Charford (although the school has a very active evening programme), and 60% at Three Crosses. With the exception of Charford School, the lower number of positive responses comes from the community groups with less participation in activities. However, there is no common pattern and just as the 23% comparatively high rate of participation may be linked to the average 9.5 positive responses for the community group at Holmleigh, the 26% participation at Castle School produces the lowest community rating of strengths with an average of only 6.7 positive returns. If all indicators of knowledge and experience of the schools are put together there is a positive relationship between knowledge of the school and rating of strengths. Vale and Holmleigh Schools suffer in this respect.

The survey data also included the numbers of

respondents talking about the school at work, at social events or with neighbours. Comparison of these figures shows that there was less tendency to talk about schools at social events especially in the less affluent environments. Overall there was more discussion about schools with neighbours. This accords with the findings of the Scottish Education Department (1989) in that talking about schools with neighbours is one of the most quoted sources of knowledge for prospective parents. This also bears out the Williams (1988), and Elliott (1981) findings. About half of the respondents overall have talked about the school at work. The greater spread of the workforce in some areas may mean that the reputation of the school is discussed over a wider area and there is interview evidence that this has occurred at Castle and Charford Schools both of which report an increased catchment area in the past three years.

#### Ex Post Facto Research

These comparisons, although having a numerical basis, are related to the way in which individual schools are perceived to have strengths and about the way in which knowledge of the school varies between the

stakeholders involved with the different schools. The above analysis may have indicated relationships but it is not numerically exact, or certain in its conclusions. The factors which influence the opinion of the individual groups may be other than the suggested explanations. This is demonstrated at Holmleigh where the special facilities are rated highest by all three groups. From this it may be inferred that the school has excellent facilities for the educational process but interview evidence shows that most community respondents have made their judgement on the basis of knowledge of the sports hall and stage facilities and are unaware of the problems faced in securing funding for an educational information technology network. A similar misunderstanding occurs at Three Crosses school where uniform requirements are very rigid within the school but are not imposed for outer garments with consequent community criticism.

Both these examples illustrate ex post facto research problems as outlined by Ary, Jacobs and Razavich (1972). There may be an attempt to relate present perceptions to past development or experience on the part

of the respondent but the subjectivity has to be recognised and allowed for in analysis. Some case studies may produce evidence of links between experience and perception but there is no certainty that the ascribed causality for any inter-relationship is accurate and it may not be verifiable by triangulation, as with an interview, because of the differing experience of individuals approached in an investigation. This caution underlines the assumptions made in the rest of this chapter when an attempt is made to examine the way in which schools can affect the views of stakeholder groups. The subjectivity, bias and degree of involvement and understanding of each respondent will have determined the responses upon which this series of hypotheses are based.

### Factors Affecting Perceptions of Schools

#### (a) Development of the school

There was evidence from interviews that the antecedents of the present school may have determined the attitude of stakeholders to the present perceived strengths of the organisation. Of the seven schools investigated Albermarle is the only one to have developed as a



comprehensive from the grammar school without major upheaval and is still seen as the "old grammar school" in the area despite the fact that the change occurred in 1974. It is significant that the strengths are still those associated with the grammar school ethos and current recruitment strategies build on these. By contrast Vale is still seen to be the former secondary modern school despite reorganisation in 1986, and Albert school suffers even more within its community because it is believed to have been a secondary modern school occupying the buildings from which the grammar school "had been ousted because of political pressures and for no good educational reason" as explained by a resident. Castle and Charford schools were however, developed from an old secondary modern basis but it may be that they were seen to move upmarket because both schools had minimal reorganisation and a good level of refurbishment which may have altered their identity in the locality. Three Crosses has suffered because as a comprehensive it was established in the secondary modern buildings and is believed to have taken on the mantle of the former school. However, because both buildings were in use for

the first six years following reorganisation the anti-academic feeling was not allowed to develop - current problems stem from the intensity of competition from the independent and voluntary aided sector rather than because of the nature of the school. Holmleigh is the only purpose built comprehensive school in the sample and the positive attitudes of the community indicate that this is recognised as a strength because it has been a stable influence in the last twenty years of local development.

Stacey (1975) has investigated the development factor in the Banbury School organisation and considered the ethos which had grown in the constituent halls at the time of investigation. McPherson and Willms (1986) have looked at a similar feature in choice in Scottish schools and reach the same conclusion that in those schools with a grammar school background there is greater emphasis on examination results, discipline, formal teaching methods and pupil appearance whilst in former secondary modern school the emphasis is on the more humanitarian aspects of educational process as shown at Castle and Vale

Schools. It is possible that the attempt to achieve academic respectability when competing against a former grammar and an independent school led Charford and Three Crosses schools to develop their emphasis on results as a strength to the detriment of caring atmosphere and parent contact.

(b). Organisation

There is evidence from the current investigation to suggest that there is a greater belief in the strengths of 11 -18 rather than 11 -16 schools. It may be though, that they are also affected because of their development rather than their organisation. The arguments about appropriate forms of comprehensive education are covered in the literature of the 1970 s ( HMI 1979 summarises these) but despite educational change there still appear to be potential clients who see greater strength in those schools with sixth forms. This is most marked in the number of responses which suggest examination results and numbers moving to further and higher education as strengths. Holmleigh, as an 11-18 school, is unusual in this sample in that it is seeking to "provide an all round education whatever the level of ability" (Options

Booklet). To assist with this aim it has developed courses for the least able sixth formers - results are correspondingly lower in traditional terms but the school scores better than the rest of its group for its caring atmosphere, parent contact and reporting system. Amongst the 11-16 schools Castle is unusual in the strength accorded to its examination results compared with the other two schools. It does however, have a high rating for its caring atmosphere suggesting a more humane approach to the learning process. All three 11-16 schools are ranked higher for the clear school rules than the 11-18 sector and this might be a reflection of the greater difficulty of agreement and enforcement at sixth form level. The situation was summed up by the responses to the same question at Castle and Charford schools. When asked about the role of prefects the Castle response was "Its a sort of one among equals because so many of the year are your mates - we are really there to keep the youngsters aware that they have to toe the line". By contrast the Charford view was "Discipline is hard to maintain because there are so many



coming near to the end of their time in school and some of them would like confrontation so that they can get out".

The internal organisation of school may have some affect on perceptions of strengths. The three rigidly streamed schools are all from the 11 -18, or 13 -18 sector. Of the other group Castle is banded in organisation but with only two form entry this is less rigid than parents and community might believe. There is however, a predominant view in all schools except Holmleigh that some form of ability banding is necessary for academic success as illustrated by interview comments at Charford

"We chose the school because they have a good setting system - all children of similar ability are taught together and it keeps them up to the mark. That is why the results are so good." (Charford Parent Out of Area).

A further aspect of organisation is the nature of learning support in the schools. In the 11 -16 schools there are special learning units with a high degree of integration into normal classroom situations. In two of the four schools with sixth forms there are discrete

special units with designated staff who do not teach others in the school. In the other two there is some integration but only into the lowest level teaching groups for some subjects. All this may explain the greater tendency for those involved in 11 -16 schools to appreciate teaching methods and the caring atmosphere - individualised learning may be easier in the smaller institution. The case studies have provided a considerable amount of evidence to support the contention that teaching and learning styles affect both self esteem and measurable outcomes (Reid, 1986).

Size, as a feature of school organisation may have affected the way in which it is seen to have strengths . The overwhelming interview evidence at Castle School is supported by similar research undertaken by Tomlinson (1990) and indicates that the knowledge of the strengths of the school springs from the fact that

"We all know each other and it is the same on the 'bus and in the village - its one big family ". (Castle student Year 10). Albert and Vale are both small enough for there to be references to the fact that students feel

known although there were two students interviewed at Vale School who suggested that this was not the case with some staff and this may explain the lower ratings for teaching help and caring atmosphere as perceived by leavers. Stability of staffing during the years of falling roll management from 1983 -8 may compensate for the greater size of the 11-18 and 13-18 schools. This might explain the higher number of positive ratings by leavers at Three Crosses school compared with the other schools in the group which have had a greater degree of staff turnover.

#### (c). Community Relationships

Consideration of the case studies supports the view expressed by Watts (1980) that the greater the degree of community involvement the greater the degree of understanding of the school. This is also the basic contention of Sayer and Williams (1989) in the management of external relationships by the school. Wallis and Mee (1983) and Martin (1986/7) have outlined the ways in which the community may be involved and see a progression from use of premises and facilities by the community, extended as a second stage to curriculum

involvement both within and outside the school, culminating in community involvement in management structures. Observation of the seven schools suggests that Holmleigh is the only one to have reached the third stage and this may explain the high level of community perception of school strengths because members of a defined and essentially local community are involved in the management of resources, the planning of joint activities and the development of the tutorial programme as well as following traditional evening activities. At Charford, Three Crosses and Vale the second stage has been reached with classes and the use of facilities being supported by school use of community opportunities including visits, employer liaison, work experience (except at Charford), and support for the social education programme. These three schools appear to be rated more highly by the community than Castle, Albermarle, and Albert schools where the level of involvement is that of use of facilities for lettings and classes with only some development of work experience and community group work.



If there is a link between the development of the community as partners in the schools it might be that this link leads to understanding of certain strengths. This may be shown by the rating for special facilities given as a strength by all community respondents at Holmleigh dropping to a rating of facilities as a strength by only 33% of those at Albermarle where community awareness is least developed. Teaching methods are also most highly rated by Holmleigh respondents and not given rating as a strength by any who replied at Albermarle.

In discussion of this hypothesis with staff at both schools the point was made that this would only apply to those features which the members of the community saw whilst in the building

"Community understanding of examination results, and of numbers going to higher education must usually come from information given in the local press". (Standard scale teacher, Holmleigh).

Further investigation might look at the degree of community involvement in more detail, for example breaking the use of the community as a curriculum

resource into components including social education, assemblies, visits, work experience, community at work, community service and such other local arrangements as might operate. It would then be possible to test the hypothesis that involvement out of school leads to a better informed public than involvement only in school. This has been shown at Three Crosses where a considerable number of students are in the local community for work experience and community service - the community rating of clear school rules, parent contact and the reporting system may show an understanding of what the school is about.

It would be a mistake to consider this aspect of school philosophy and practice as affecting the community group alone. The experience that leavers have had in the community has given them an opportunity to represent the school to the world outside. As one Castle student commented

"I split my work experience into two separate weeks. The thing that struck me was the way in which each work situation led people to ask me about the school and how we did things." (Head Boy, Castle School).

Similarly a large number of parents at Castle, Vale, Three Crosses, HOLMLEIGH and Charford use the premises and responded as parents but were also part of the community using the schools.

#### (d). Public Relations Policies

It is possible that public perceptions of schools can be managed by the staff of the schools and policies about public relations developed to provide a common approach to recruitment. Gray (1989) has suggested that the shared values of the staff provide the basis of the policy to be adopted by any school and the implementation of such a policy has been detailed by recent writers including Scribbins and Davies( 1988) and Watkins (1989). There are three levels at which recruitment may be managed. It may be a matter of the communication of school aims, policies and achievements through brochures, open evenings, and visits. It may be extended through school policies which are aimed at giving the public the "package" which it is demanding in matters of uniform, appearance, parent contact or teaching method for example. It may be further developed to lead to public

sponsorship but has been justified in that each additional student will bring £1,600 to the school. It may be that this is rather more than many parents or the community want and it may have affected the response of those who, as one parent suggested, "Feel that the school has something to hide". (Parent Year 9).

Sponsorship pays for the coloured brochures at Holmleigh "as part of our service to the community" (Employer, sponsor), and school funds meet the cost of a more modest coloured brochure at Albermarle. Vale School utilises its own desktop publishing facilities and advertises the brochures as a product of the school. All three schools in the same area as Albert have a media relations officer, refurbished entrance areas and a procedure for visitors. Holmleigh is exceptional in that there is less emphasis on "reputation" to the students. Interview evidence suggest that this is over emphasised to pupils at Albert, Vale and Albermarle.

The other three schools are in a different county and although they are involved in competition for students there is not the degree of "commercialism" evident in the



other group. All produce black and white brochures, all have a system for coping with visitors and potential students, all have a press officer and all have a community newsletter which is widely distributed. One member of staff at Charford commented

"We get asked about the extra-curricular activities and hand out our newsletters with teams and music production details - we play to our strengths in pushing these but we don't go over the top in what we do with the environment - parents want evidence of good teaching and good results".

In these three schools there is no evidence of a public relations policy but they are aware of the need "to give a good impression backed up by the detail of the achievements of the school so that a balanced judgement can be made" (Deputy Head, Three Crosses).

Whilst all these features are evident in the school there is no way in which the survey data shows that concentration on such activities produces changed perceptions. Albert School makes the greatest effort according to the criteria in Cameron, Rushton and Carson

(1988) applying commercial marketing strategies to the school situation but although it influences the parents group it is unable to persuade the community of the strengths of the school. Vale is the most over-subscribed of the schools in 1991, even if this is based on perceptions of the school's ability to cope with less able students, but its public relations policy is possibly the most "low key" of all the schools investigated.

#### (e).Management Style

On the basis that there might be some relationship between stakeholders' views of the strengths of each school and the management style of the school this element of school organisation was further examined. There are several typologies of management style (Bush, (1990), Handy and Aitken, (1986), Bolman and Deal (1984)) but in this investigation reference is made to open and consultative styles compared to closed and autocratic approaches. On the assumption that the more open style tends to involve more of the stakeholders in the management of the institution there might be some greater awareness about school policy and practice.

If this assumption is applied to the schools in the survey Castle and Holmleigh schools are the most open in style with consultative mechanisms involving staff, students, parents and the community. In both of these there is a high degree of consistency between at least two of the constituent groups in "process" strengths. This contrasts with the mismatch in opinion in Charford, Albermarle and Albert schools where there is a much more autocratic approach as shown in comments such as "the students advisory group is drawn from Year 11 and meets from time to time when I want their opinion on issues" (Head, Albert) which contrasts with the student perception shown in the comment

"We have met twice this year and we did get a new payphone. He said that he would think about a change to the girls' uniform". (Student, Year 11).

It may be that those more open schools do offer more opportunity for discussion of ideas, and do involve more levels of the school community in the discussion. Certainly the degree of positive response overall suggests that the more open the style the higher the

level of perceived strengths in the school.

(f). Shared Values

Rutter et al (1979) established the highly subjective but nevertheless evident quality of the ethos of the school. This has been further developed as climate by Strivens (1985) and as tone by Gray and Nicholl (1982). There are difficulties in evaluating a concept which is both nebulous and subjective. However, there is a "feel" about each of the schools in the survey and this appears to be related to the shared values which are held by all sections of the school community. Sayer and Williams (1989) stress that the reputation of the school is dependent upon the behaviour and attitudes of both the students and the staff, in the belief that a common front to the various external groups which beset a school is evidence of a cohesive loyalty.

It is difficult to evaluate the shared values of the schools in the survey. All have full statements of aims, all produce policy statements which link these aims to school practice and all have provided evidence of some good practice where these aims are in operation. However,



there are examples of a mismatch between the stated aims of the school and actual practice. If the opinion of the leavers is to be believed it is hard to reconcile their experience with the stated aims of one school which states

"We aim to be a caring school which strives for the highest standards, whether it be for academic excellence, or for concern and care for each pupil as an individual, or for proper order and discipline"

Help from teaching staff and a caring atmosphere are ranked 10th. and 11th. overall at this school which also has the lowest allocation of teaching time for students with special learning difficulties.

By contrast another of the schools has a similar set of aims

"We consider ourselves to be a caring school which sets and expects high standards, offers a wide ranging curriculum which caters for all, challenges young people in all sorts of ways to achieve excellence and values the individuality of all its members". The strengths of the school are seen to lie in the emphasis on work, teaching

methods, teaching staff help, a caring atmosphere and parent contact - all of which are in line with the aims. The staff as a group are currently most concerned that they are not achieving excellence in the behaviour and expectations of the students and relate this to the need for clarification of school rules.

A similar exercise with the other five schools suggests that those which have their aims at the heart of the educational experience and use them as a yardstick in both practice and development planning are actually better understood by their stakeholders. This is certainly true of those schools which have been rated to have the higher number of strengths per respondent in all groups.

How the common message is given varies from school to school. At its most effective it is summed up by one member of staff

"This is a good place to be. There may be 70 of us but we are a team and we know that our job is to work together for the kids in whatever we are doing. There may be dissension in the ranks but we keep that to ourselves and if the Head were to hear of any disloyalty or careless

speaking there would be the devil to pay" (Head of Department, 12 years in Holmleigh School). This comment does question the reality of an allegedly open style of management should such an autocratic response result, but there is a sense in which the head, as custodian of the shared values may display another face of leadership in ensuring compliance. It may be that the transmission of shared values is something related to the nature of leadership as suggested by Peters and Waterman (1982) or Harvey-Jones (1988) but it may also be related to the style of that leadership as discussed earlier. It seems that the stakeholders have a greater confidence in those schools where policy and practice are commonly held by all staff. The evidence of the survey suggests that where this is not so, despite the most strenuous endeavours of the Head and senior management, the educational process is seen to be less effective.

#### The Transmission of Perceptions

The case study investigations provided evidence of the way in which the stakeholders develop their awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of schools. More than 50%

of respondents in all schools had discussed the school with neighbours, at social events or at work. About 70% of respondents had experience of the schools either through attendance as pupils in the past, as parents of other children in the schools, or by attending evening activities. Responses in interviews confirmed the existence of a three stage development in the local grapevine.

#### a.Reputation

This is a subjective judgement, often based on stories circulating in the area which may, or may not, have been true at some stage in the past. It may be related to the experiences of those who are giving an opinion but is more frequently ascribed to "they" as a source of information. Reputation may last for a long period of time: of the seven case study schools two were continuing to be seen as academic because of the fact that they were originally established as grammar schools, and two were experiencing difficulty in establishing local credibility because they had come from secondary modern roots over five years previously. This supports the findings of Echols, McPherson and Willms (1990) in their analysis of



the comparative popularity of Scottish schools. It also reflects the earlier work by McPherson and Willms (1986) in which they present a socio-historical explanation for the popularity of Victorian and Edwardian schools within the city areas.

There was little evidence of the destruction of reputation in any of the case study schools except for the way in which emphasis on the needs of the less able led to the removal of several more able students from Albert at a crucial stage in its development. It does not appear to have recovered despite considerable public relations effort.

All the schools in the sample were relatively successful in maintaining numbers. Investigation with schools of declining reputation may provide further evidence of more rapid parental reaction to a change in policy. There is some suggestion that Three Crosses may have taken five years to recover from comprehensive reorganisation which was locally believed to be detrimental to the students of the former grammar school. There is evidence that another has begun to suffer from

the appointment of a more liberal head, but the school is so over-subscribed that this cannot be statistically supported.

#### b. Knowledge

This is a second stage of understanding based on factual knowledge. It may reflect the effectiveness of the management of school communication with the local environment and it is more likely to be an interpretation of experience on the part of those making comments. Rutter (1979) provided considerable evidence that differences between schools were related to their own individual human social system and that where there was self-esteem and a sense of purpose for management, staff, and students alike then there would be a positive and successful atmosphere. The case study investigations have shown that the transmission of the facts of the "human social system" to the stakeholder groups is of considerable importance in securing a knowledge of the school in the local community. Judgement is then made on the strength of informed opinion. Holmleigh was developed as a community school from its inception and has shown that local loyalty can be maintained even though academic

outcomes are not high. Charford has shown that continual emphasis on its achievements through local networks has resulted in a positive view of the school although there are some serious questions about elements of pastoral and guidance policy on the part of many leavers and staff. The school is still recruiting to capacity because it has made sure that its academic success is known locally. Sayer and Williams (1989) have stressed the need for effective networks so that the school is known, and its purposes and practices understood, within its community. The case studies have demonstrated the importance attached to this by senior management in all except Albermarle, and this is possibly the most vulnerable if there should be any challenge to its reputation, for example with a fall in examination achievements or a change in local perception of student behaviour. There is evidence that staff stability, staff living in the neighbourhood, staff participation as members of the community rather than as school teachers, and staff involvement in community activities all promote knowledge of the school and are recognised by the stakeholders

interviewed. There is also evidence that staff are of fundamental importance in managing relationships with the community and there are examples of misplaced, insensitive or disloyal comments countering much positive work undertaken by the schools.

### c. Involvement

The case studies showed that there is a body of reasonably accurate knowledge of the ways in which the schools work, including knowledge of the personalities and practices of the organisation. This appears to be enhanced when groups of stakeholders become increasingly involved and aware of the development of the school. Interest and involvement appear to enhance public perceptions of the school by "putting knowledge to the test" in seeing the school as a facility or opportunity for community use. This increasing awareness has been shown by the three constituent groups in this investigation.

Parent involvement through attendance at activities and the use of open day opportunities may develop before the pupil is admitted. Stillman (1990) shows that there has been an increase in parents



expressing opinions about schools as part of the open enrolment process and questions whether the aspirations of many parents will be capable of satisfaction when schools are already at capacity. There is evidence from six of the seven case study schools that these pressures are already being experienced. Further evidence suggest that parental awareness of their rights in the process is no longer confined to an upwardly mobile, vociferous, professional group. Newson and Newson (1987) suggest that there is a fall off in parental interest in school activities in the lower socio-economic groups because of the more limited range of cultural interest. The evidence from the case study schools suggests that this situation may be changing as the impact of open enrolment affects school policies. Analysis of the geographic dispersion of out of area applicants at Castle and Three Crosses indicates that expression of preference, attendance at open evenings and readiness to attend appeals occurs in a full range of homes across the socio-economic spectrum. This is particularly so for the city fringe schools where at Vale and Holmleigh, increasing numbers of students are

moving from the inner city depressed areas in parental expectation of better opportunities on greenfield sites.

The effect of personal and social education development within the curriculum over the past decade, and an increasing emphasis on speaking skills may have been responsible for the increased awareness, by leavers, of school policy making processes in all the schools investigated. There appears to be a more positive appreciation of the school in those instances where the open nature of discussion has extended to students through the Student Council or similar organisation. Of the seven schools involved, the two schools which have been slower to adopt greater student involvement are the two where the ratings of strengths by students are at their lowest. The three with the highest ratings have consistently involved students in school policy discussions. However, in all the schools the readiness of students to participate in this investigation and to make considered, generally mature, comments in interviews, suggests that they are well aware of school policy and are able to sum up what it feels like to be a student at the school.

Although three of the seven schools are concerned at the possibly negative impact of local management of schools upon community development, six of the seven schools detailed movement along a spectrum of community involvement from use of facilities through to joint participation in management. This appears to have increased local interest in the standard of schools even if, as some interviews showed, media comment had been supported or discredited according to what respondents had seen or heard in the area. There was only one school where respondents returned forms saying that they knew nothing of the school.

#### The Impact of Perception on the Education Service

The transmission of perceptions about schools is affecting L.E.A. provision through the exercise of choice. The case study evidence demonstrates some elements of pressures at work in the administration of the education service. The greatest concern following the introduction of open enrolment after the 1988 Act was that there would be "winners" and "losers" amongst schools and that the losers would eventually close

because income is so closely related to student numbers. There are three elements of this which could be dramatically affected by public perceptions of school strengths and there is some case study evidence that the fears expressed by Hart (1988) and Maclure (1989) may be operative.

#### a. Local Education Authority Planning

Tweedie (1986b) has demonstrated the impact of choice on the way in which local education authorities can plan to meet the requirements that surplus school places are removed (National Audit Office, 1986). The incompatibility between legislating for choice and the provision of a cost effective local education service is demonstrated in four of the case study schools. Albert, occupying the site of a former grammar school, is provided by the l.e.a. despite the fact that there are eight hundred surplus places in the division because planning was undertaken before grant-maintained status was accorded to a neighbouring school. Vale, with a high standard admission number, is having to use seven temporary rooms because the permanent accommodation had been altered in the intervening years in order to meet



curriculum demands in Information Technology and Special needs education. Albermarle is experiencing the problems of overcrowding because it has endeavoured to meet all the current applications for places although two neighbouring schools are losing students, and the growth of Holmleigh is at the expense of several inner-city schools none of which are losing sufficient students to allow for efficient organisation. The provenance of Year 7 students in this school shows that the gain of 42 students is from five secondary schools, the greatest loss being of 17 from one school leaving it with three and one half forms of entry. There is other anecdotal evidence to suggest that as the open enrolment pattern affects all year groups some schools will be under intolerable pressures. Forward planning by the senior management at Vale shows that although the standard number is 1200 with an annual intake of 240 as an 11-16 school, the admission of 270 to meet local demand will actually cause overcrowding in three years time as the smaller year groups at the top of the school work their way through and the larger groups move up. In

this school, as with others the L.E.A. has not inhibited governors' wishes to recruit to capacity, and indeed over capacity, to achieve budgets aimed at staff retention and building improvement. Despite the existence of L.E.A. and local heads' agreements on recruitment and admission policies there is further evidence that limits are being broken by "exceptional cases" and by the granting of admission on appeal. The complexity of the situation with two of the case study schools is such that forward planning was destroyed by the late admission of 23 Year 7 students in this way.

b. "A full school is a good school"

Part of the problem for the L.E.A.s arises from the perception by many of the public that if a school is popular it must be a good school. Pressures such as those described above, then operate with eventual inefficiency in the use of accommodation resources. Leyserman (1983) suggested that the converse might well be true and showed how Sladebrook, when it was passing through its most unpopular phase attracting only 40% of its capacity, it was actually an effective, caring and responsive school. Funding arrangements are now very different and it may be

that closure would operate before these qualities could be demonstrated.

Case study evidence suggests that the full schools are the most popular within their areas. Whether they are necessarily "good" is dependent upon interpretation of outcome and process indicators and the viewpoint of the person making the judgement. Of the three constituent groups of respondents in each of seven schools only one group of leavers and two community groups rated the school concerned with less than half of the listed strengths, and interview evidence suggests that with more open opportunities even these groups were prepared to concede that they were talking about a good school.

The one school with surplus places, Albert, might be seen to be unpopular and, therefore, a bad school, by its stakeholders but there was no evidence that this was so. In this case it is an effect of over-provision of places in the district concerned. Two sets of comments did suggest that the "full = good" view does affect parents in decision making about schools. One argued that the full school "must be the better school because more

parents are trying to get their children there." (Parent, Charford). Another suggested that even though it was overcrowded the chose school must be better "because they know that if they don't stay good, they will lose students". (Parent, Albermarle). In short, case study evidence supports the view that the public see a popular school to be a good school and this exacerbates local planning.

### c. Educational Disadvantage

It is suggested that choice will lead to the growth of some schools which attract from a wide area with a decline in opportunities for those students who remain at the neighbourhood alternative. This has been developed by Clough et al (1989) who see that the schools which are not popular will have to attempt to develop within their own resources instead of having additional L.E.A. support to meet their particular needs. They develop the view that the changes in admissions policies have favoured those with the cultural strength to make informed choices and this may lead to further divisions in society. The case study evidence suggests that whilst there are a broad range of parents actually expressing a



choice "out of area" they tend to be those who have the financial resources to pay for daily transport, to be those who are ready to question and press the system if necessary, and to make choice on the basis of academic expectation for their children. Two of the case study schools did however, indicate that there is an increase in the range of parents prepared to press for the school of their choice. At one school these were the parents from the inner city area who wanted a school in a different environment, and in the other there were parents from the full socio-economic spectrum who perceived the particular strengths of the school to be in the support given to those with learning difficulties. Evidence suggests that parents across a wider economic and cultural range are beginning to assert their choice of school and that the response from the schools may be to market those features which are seen as their strengths.

### Conclusion

Throughout the investigation of the case study schools a recurrent theme has been the subjectivity of opinions

held by stakeholder groups about the schools concerned. There is evidence that this may be declining as increased knowledge and involvement build upon reputation on the local grapevine. Even so the case study evidence suggests that the way in which judgement is made appears to be related to the environment and development of each individual school. Outcomes, or product criteria, are more significant in the judgement of 11-18 schools but the 11-16 schools appear to be judged on features of the educational process rather than outcomes which, in some instances, are excused by the stakeholders interviewed. Further, there is interview evidence to suggest that many respondents were rationalising their judgement of a school to accord with their children's wishes or to accord with family convenience. The extent of match between reality and perception will be discussed further in Chapter 7 but the evidence from this group of schools suggests that there are few marked discrepancies except between understanding of work emphasis as a process and knowledge of numbers moving to further education as an outcome of the schools. As the results of this investigation have become available to the individual

**schools their response has been to pay attention to these features in their communication strategies.**

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSIONS

#### Evaluation of the Investigation

This investigation set out to consider the nature, reliability and impact of community perceptions of schools. It grew from experience of parental pressure for places in one school and an investigation of the way in which the exercise of preference was affecting provision within one county. The basic task was to ascertain how judgements were made, their validity and the extent to which they were capable of management by schools. If management is possible then incomplete knowledge or false reputation could be overcome by school awareness of the areas in which the match between perception and reality is not sustained. Some comment has already been made in Chapter 3 concerning the potential problems of achieving an objective investigation of a topic which, because it is so dependent upon opinion, is likely to be affected by the experience and background of respondents. This may mean that the pursuit of objectivity is illusory because the entire investigation has been based upon the way in



which individuals who constitute the community think about their schools. As Westoby (1989), suggests preference is based, in part, on judgement of reputation. The reality may differ from the community perception but it appears to be the latter which conditions opinion for or against the school.

(a) The Selection of Criteria - Burford School

Investigation

This was based on discussions with groups of stakeholders who were already involved in the life of the school and the forty one features of school life identified by them may reflect their understanding of the values and practices of the school. It is possible that if the same exercise had been undertaken in an urban, and recently developed school, some of the criteria would not have been included; Latin and separate sciences could well have been replaced by a greater attention to special needs in curriculum arrangements. Although this was allowed for in the final selection of twelve criteria used in the case study schools there may have been some bias towards the culture of a traditional school. Further, despite all the procedures followed to ensure

otherwise, the respondents in this part of the work may have responded on the basis of their knowledge of Burford School rather than on their beliefs about the way in which they would judge any school.

#### b. The Identification of Strengths - Case Study Schools

The research was based on seven differing schools with well defined communities and environments. The level of response was comparatively high and the three identified stakeholder groups responded to a sufficient extent to permit comparison and generalisation in analysis. The survey approach used has deficiencies especially where, in seeking a balance between response rate and detail, a quick completion method reduces the opportunity for comment, or for either the semantics, or the sentiment, of phrases to be fully investigated. Sellitz, Wrightsman and Cook (1976) explore the extent to which responses are invalidated by the nature of the questionnaire and the circumstances of completion and there is evidence in the case study schools that there was an inconsistent approach to the administration of the survey. The format of the response form may have created

problems arising from lack of precise explanation of the criteria and of a typographic misalignment on some forms which might have caused some wrong responses, and certainly caused some frustration.

It is possible that the decision to use seven schools where the writer was working in another capacity also invalidated some of the responses. This may be especially so of interviews where knowledge of the school's participation in the University of Keele Successful Schools project may have given respondents the message that the school was strong in many respects. The advantage of involvement was, however, felt in the collection of much of the qualitative data on school effectiveness.

So many of the reservations about method in school effectiveness work outlined by Madaus, Airasian and Kellaghan (1980) apply in this investigation. The size and nature of the sample may be questioned because, although there was a range of background, size and situation it is possible that the sample lacked a school which was truly disadvantaged or one in which there was a lack of community interest. The survey would have had

greater value in meeting the aims of the work if the specific details of parent and leaver groups and the range of community respondents requested of the schools had been structured to give a greater socio-economic range. There is no clear evidence that a true range of respondents was obtained in each school: comments on returns suggest that many respondents were those willing to help in such work - often pillars of the P.T.A. and associated activities. The justification for the methods chosen is related to the need to attempt a broad sweep survey in a number of schools in a short period of time. The framework for this work has been to see how criteria adopted by stakeholders in the evaluation of schools can be applied in a number of schools, and to consider the evidence of the implications of public perceptions for individual schools and the school system in an area.

Triangulation by up to thirty interviews in each school community showed that most stakeholders judged school effectiveness by similar standards. There was evidence that some comment was made on the basis of insufficient knowledge or of hearsay from a third party



but this reflects findings in the research mentioned in Chapters 3 and 4 which suggest that this is how judgements are reached in reality. The interviews showed just how dependent judgement is upon belief. Consequently, objectivity has been difficult to achieve in this work with the problems inherent in case study verification arising from the personal viewpoint of those concerned as explained by Denzin (1970).

It is also possible that the decision to draw from three groups associated with the school may have given a different outcome to an approach which might have concentrated only on the community as drawn from the external environment of the school. The fact that all three groups are described as stakeholders may well imply a greater degree of interest and involvement than would be evident if a random sample of "people in the street" had been approached. The decision to see the community as a network reaching out from the school, and essentially formative, was fundamental to the investigation. It was a strength in that the "grapevine" was demonstrated and it allowed some work on the way in which views of a school are transmitted. Despite these reservations the survey

allowed for investigation of the match between the perceived strengths of schools as assessed by up to 100 people in each school. It is argued that this was a sufficient sample to make comparison of opinion with evidence a worthwhile investigation.

### c. The Validity of Generalisation

The empirical work was based on two shire counties, albeit with one inner city and one conurbation fringe school. The participants were willing to co-operate and, despite best endeavours to secure a range of community members for interview, there was a bias towards those who had some association with the school. This actually meant that there were fewer "don't know" responses. With one exception, the schools were all experiencing pressures arising from popularity and this could give a more optimistic view of strengths and achievements. Interview evidence pointed to a generally high staff morale, co-operative students and interested communities despite the problems of the management of change and the threat of a decline of resources. Generalisations about the way in which perceptions are

formed and transmitted may not be valid if applied to less supportive environments or less favoured schools.

(d). The Investigation of Match Between Perception and Reality

This element of the investigation created the most problems because the effectiveness indicators against which the respondents' assessment of strengths can be made are themselves difficult to define and measure. Following the 1988 Education Act, attention has been paid to indicators which have some objectivity, but which are both realistic in recognising the nature of the intake and socio-economic environment of the schools, and practical, in that valid data can be collected without detriment to the work of the school, as discussed by Wakefield (1988). The only indicators which match these criteria appear to be associated with school outcomes for which some statistical comparison can be developed. Adler, Petch and Tweedie (1989), King (1986), and Macbeth (1984) demonstrate the attractiveness of product data to parents in their choice of school. However, the case study investigations relied on a range of process factors as well as outcomes and even the appearance of pupils,

arguably an outcome, is subject to qualitative assessment. For the current investigation four descriptors were used for each criterion based on the evaluative framework operating in four of the schools involved and whilst it has been possible to record the number of these descriptors pertinent to each school, another observer may have found evidence for a different set of results. On reflection many of the descriptors used in Fig.3 are capable of varied interpretation and substantiation and may be poor indicators of the strengths of any one school in its particular environment. Whilst the overall impression is that the stakeholders have a fair understanding of the schools they were asked to judge, it must be remembered that the basis for descriptors as the foundation of reality in each school is problematic.

#### The Subjectivity of the Investigation

Evidence has been presented to demonstrate that in seven schools there was a fair understanding of the life, work and values of the school by the local community. These findings have allowed consideration of the way in



which opinion is formed and managed within the community at large. The problems arising from the work are associated with interpretation of material which may be suspect because it relies on individual judgement of criteria which are open to differing interpretation. Mention has been made of the problems of finding objective measures of effectiveness against which to match the collective judgement of respondents. In short the investigation has its limitations because of an attempt to match two sets of data both of which are subjective. This can be seen in three ways, each of which links to one of the stakeholder groups.

(a).School - Environment Relationships

In an analysis of the relationship between schools and their environments McPherson, Crowson and Pitner (1990) suggest that three models may operate. The political model stresses the interaction between school and environment with resource provision as the greatest influence on the relationship; the public choice approach suggests that schools are affected by the combined pressures of individuals in the environment and schools respond to these pressures or face loss of students,

whilst the organisational ecology model suggests that the school adapts to its environment in order to secure continued existence by recognising the management of pressures and opportunities. In considering the case study schools examples can be found of all three. Castle enjoys a two way interaction with its community, is accorded high status locally and has developed its policies so that it uses its environment and respects the various pressures within the community. Three Crosses is aware of the competing schools, and the expressed views of its community so that it adapts to meet these tensions, whilst Holmleigh, with its strong community involvement, has evolved to serve the broad educational needs of a clearly defined catchment area as they have changed over a period of time. Whatever the adaptive stance the schools are, however, having to recognise the pressures of the environment. Greenfield ( 1975) argues that the environment is formed by a collection of individuals with individual cultures, beliefs and values but who may influence each other through societal processes. It is possible that a school serving an area

with a degree of local prosperity, entrepreneurial activity and academic expectations, as at Charford, will be under greater pressure to develop outcomes, than one serving an area where the community is drawn from a wider socio-economic range with a variety of expectations as at Vale. Judgement will be affected by the starting point of the individuals concerned and the collective views which develop. Where there are clear collective expectations match may be achieved by recognition of the environmental demands and adaptation to them by school management; mismatch, by failure to recognise the nature of external pressures or the networks which lead to their expression. As a stakeholder group the community may see the school according to the degree of match which obtains. Where the school is attempting to introduce values at variance with the environmental culture, as demonstrated by Riseborough (1981), the community tension may increase.

#### (b). School-Parent Relationships

Parents are at the boundary between the school as an organisation and its environment. They form their judgements from their interpretation of events, often at third or fourth hand from their children, and put their

own interpretation on staff comments made at parents evenings, meetings and social events. They also represent the school to the environment again responding in order to support or criticise the school according to their perceptions of school practice and policy. Both Charford and Albermarle suffer from this in that concentration by the school on examination results and streamed forms of organisation has led the parents, and hence the wider community, to believe that the outcomes are more important than the care of the individual in the development of school policy. In all this there is a decided bias in that parents tend to interpret through the eyes of their children and the grapevine is affected by individual experience. Macbeth (1989) has recognised this as the basis for alternative approaches to home school relationships. As a stakeholder group, the parents may be rather less subjective than the community because of their greater knowledge and involvement in the school, but there is evidence that tensions may arise if the school does not react to their interpretation of practice and events. This was shown at Castle where a small group



of parents sought reassurance that the integration of one special needs student into mainstream work would not be detrimental to the progress of their children, and at Charford where a small minority of parents were opposed to the view that students should remain on the premises at lunch-time and sought, in this case unsuccessfully, a reversal of policy agreed by the Governors. In each case the parents concerned were placated on the basis of policy changes "being good for the school". These examples suggest that although there is an increased match in understanding the practices of the school there is also increased involvement by this stakeholder group.

#### (c). School-Pupil Relationships

The leavers have their views of the school conditioned by a number of years within the institution and may well have been the most objective group of respondents because of their involvement. Nevertheless, as shown in the interviews, there is a degree of personal interpretation of the organisation, rationale and philosophy of the school. The responses sought were from young people at the end of their school experience and at a stage of intellectual development where some of the

fundamental premises upon which their education had been based were subject to personal evaluation. The small numbers moving to further education in some schools may reflect this. Judgement is therefore, affected by the way in which possible tensions have been managed . This appears to be related to the extent of open relationships between students and staff. Where these do not exist there seems to be both misunderstanding of the purposes of school policy, and criticism of the gap between stated policy and its implementation. This appears to provide an example of the opportunity for multiple interpretations of "reality", and the tension between the organisation and individual perceptions of what that means.(Greenfield, 1975). The reality of the day to day experience of school existence may affect judgement about matters of behaviour, expectations and appearance and as a stakeholder group they may have given more informed and honest comments as discussed by Phillips and Callelly, (1981). However, school folklore is a potent force in interpretation and may reduce the reliability of data particularly where there is a hidden agenda, as expressed

by one student at Three Crosses who asked

" Will what we say make any difference to the way they think of us in the School".

### The Problem of Interpretation

In their work on "Rivendell" Ribbins et al (1981) discussed the multiple meanings which condition the way in which individuals act within an organisation. The analysis of the subjectivity of each group within the collective stakeholders for a school provides many additional examples of the need for caution in the interpretation of data. This does not mean that the data is invalid, the cautions are concerned with the way in which generalisations are drawn from the evidence. Indeed, it is suggested that where a sufficient number of respondents make the same judgement, even if based upon hearsay or hunch rather than fact, it has a reality which gives it "truth" in the eyes of those concerned. This is certainly so with some of the perceptions held in local communities e.g. that Three Crosses pupils have poor standards of appearance, that Charford is not a caring community or that Albert specialises in the needs of the

less able students. Because they believe it to be so, community respondents give an objectivity which evidence does not substantiate. Interpretation of match between perceptions and reality is thus inhibited - how many of the supposed strengths are acknowledged by respondents without consideration of evidence but because of hearsay? The staff of the schools concerned in this investigation appear to recognise this factor and its importance in determining community opinion, and hence, recruiting. There were many examples of reaction to "they say" in planning marketing strategies in the case study schools. At Albert the determination to show the community that the school was aware of opinion regarding litter in the locality; at Vale, reaction to the rumour that some students might have been involved with soft drugs, and at Three Crosses, the implementation of a town patrol at lunch-times, all show a public relations response to problems ascribed to the school but in every example there was no evidence of truth in the assertions made. The strengths of the schools appear to be recognised because of this reaction - the match is in response to perception rather than in response to hard evidence.



### Some Implications of the Research

Considerations of this sort must be recognised in both the evaluation of the current research and in any view of a way forward. This thesis has been based on an attempt to see how far there is divergence between views of a school by parents on entry, leavers and the community served by the school, and the reality of school process and outcomes. Evidence, despite the caveats discussed above, suggests that where the relationship between school and environment is such that community views of the school are based on actual knowledge or involvement, rather than on unsubstantiated hearsay, there is a closer match between perceived and real strengths. This supports the view that schools can, and do, develop a public relations policy. There was evidence that this exists before the students enter, exemplified in primary liaison; whilst the students are active in the school, shown by the use of press releases, and through the development of community involvement as a means of increasing local understanding. This has implications for both school and education service management.

#### a. School Management

The case study schools showed that they were aware of environmental pressures and took these into account in strategic planning. The development of more open approaches to the community, the evolution of a community curriculum and the adoption of self-evaluative techniques all reflect awareness of the need to show the values of the school to the community it reacts with. Sanday, (1990) suggests that there may be some resistance by staff to changes within school organisation because of "homeostatic resistance", but some interview evidence suggests that staff are more ready to adapt if this might reduce the turbulence consequent upon a fall in numbers. The case study schools were all using evaluative techniques to ensure that their strategic planning recognised the expressed needs of a variety of stakeholder groups as a basis for change. Match between perception and reality is an element which can be managed.

#### b. L.E.A. Management

Consideration of the management of an L.E.A. based

service has only been peripheral to this investigation but two issues arise from the findings. The first is to question whether the availability of objective data would improve local perception of school effectiveness. Wilson and Corcoran (1989) suggest a set of data for the "School Nomination Form" which is factually based, capable of comparison over time, and understandable to the outside observer. This has been used for 571 schools in the U.S.A. over a period of three years in order to secure data on school effectiveness for comparative purposes. Powell (unpublished) outlines a system for county inspection of schools which proposes descriptors for each area of school effectiveness and classifies these according to the way in which they have been discussed fully, a policy or procedure has been formulated, adoption has been achieved and continuing evaluation set in train. This has been evolved in order to provide schools with targets which can be discussed with governors, parents and the community. Whether such objective data can be used to inform the local community with greater accuracy is open to doubt as shown in the local media use of an H.M.I. report at Albert where a

brief reference to "some pedestrian lessons" became a banner headline despite the overall comment that 85% of lessons seen were of above average quality. However, interviews suggest that the publication of the statistical data evolved for an L.E.A. review at Charford was used by parents for comparative purposes when finalising their preference between schools in the town. The case studies suggest that whatever the information the L.E.A. may be able to provide it does not materially affect the management of preference because parents think and choose at a local level and are affected by the ongoing reputation of the school which, as demonstrated with the former grammar schools, may mask a degree of mismatch between judgement and reality, particularly of process features.

The other implication of the current research for the L.E.A. service is that there is evidence of a high degree of community awareness of the strengths of schools. In consequence the worst fears that open enrolment might lead to winners and losers with problems in the efficient provision of a service may not be as

serious as at first thought. The case study schools showed an awareness of the need for quality provision so that they could maintain their recruitment but the competing schools were also adapting to meet higher expectations. It was noticeable that in each area standards of uniform and appearance were improving during the period of the investigation and there was extensive refurbishment of reception areas in the first months after local management of schools operated. Is it possible that increasing awareness by schools of the need to meet parental wishes, and by parents of the availability of high standards in the local school will reduce the wildest swings of numbers?

#### Further Research

This investigation grew from a concern at the problems of perception of two schools in close proximity. The analysis of the case study material in Chapter Six showed that for the criteria used there was a fair degree of match between perception and reality as judged by the community and evaluated within those schools. The current chapter has suggested that, because of methodological imperfections, this may not be applicable either to other



schools, differing environments, or other criteria. The investigation of perceived weaknesses rather than strengths may have yielded other findings in what is clearly a more difficult approach for schools to acknowledge. The influence of Hirschman's concept of "exit, voice and loyalty" as suggested in the post Education Reform Act period by Westoby (1989), may become discernible in changing policies and practices in schools reacting to consumerist pressures - the case study evidence suggests that this is just becoming evident but no examples have been investigated in depth.

However, it seems likely that some of the case study schools will remain, as did Burford, more attractive to parents despite the fact that there may have been a lower level of match between the strengths accorded to the school and evidence for their existence. In part this may be related to the origins and development of the school - 11-18 former grammar schools for example, but there is an element in choice which has not been investigated in the current work. It might be related to social class and associated expectations, this

was certainly implied in several of the Albermarle and Charford interviews; it might be conditioned by past experience which cannot be changed by present policies, as shown at Three Crosses; it might be affected by the management of communications as demonstrated at Holmleigh, or it might be associated with the complexities of parental choice of school which appears to be linked to the concept of "happiness". In all of these the size of the sample, the availability of accessible choice at neighbouring schools with room to accommodate applicants, and the endeavours to rationalise intuitive feelings may affect findings. The way in which individuals and the corporate groups within the environment of a school react to the school appears to be based on relationships, communications and experience all of which are difficult to assess. Whilst this thesis argues that there is a match between perception and reality which can be analysed and managed by those responsible for the philosophy and practice of the school, the fundamental problem remains that judgement is based on individual interpretation of hearsay, events and experiences. There is also evidence that in some

situations these individual beliefs become the reality by which the school succeeds or fails. The dilemma for schools in a consumer led system in which resources are tied to recruitment appears to lie in maintaining the balance between the vision and values of the school and the expectations of the community which it serves. The evidence of the current research shows that schools are making an attempt to resolve this through the management of their external environment.

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Appendix 1

Table 1 Oxfordshire Secondary Transfer 1989

Reasons related to educational system

Preferences for:-

Church Schools	72	requests
Single sex Schools	79	
Sixth form Provision	5	
11 - 16 Provision	1	
Comprehensive Provision	53	
Community School education	1	

## Appendix 1

Table 2. Oxfordshire Secondary Transfer 1989

Reasons related to family circumstances

Preferences on the grounds of :-

Sibling attendance at the school	167 requests
Family connection with school	32
Friends attending school	50
Proximity of school	32
Move imminent	12

## Appendix 1

Table 3. Oxfordshire Secondary Transfer 1989

### Reasons related to assessment of school quality

A. School Management		
	noted by 4 applicants	
Ethos		all in one school
Discipline	28	
Curriculum	23	
Special needs prov.	7	
Pastoral care	13	4 at one school
Resources/facilities	12	
Teaching quality	15	
Headship quality	8	2 at two schools
Organisation	4	
Teaching arrangements	11	4 at one school
Activities	17	4 at one school
Size of school	9	5 at one school
Atmosphere	28	8 at one school
Environment	5	
B. School Outcomes		
University places	4	
Examination results	15	3 at one school
Reputation	44	6 schools with 7
C. Marketing Strategies		
Visits	37	15 at one school
Open day	10	8 at one school
Primary links	8	
Parent liaison	1	
Tradition	1	
Brochure	1	



## Appendix 1

Table 4. Effect of pupil movements on forms of entry to Oxfordshire secondary schools. 1989

Change	Number of schools
Gain < 1 Form of entry	7
Gain 1 Form of entry	1
Gain 2 Forms of entry	5
Gain > 2 Forms of entry	2
Loss < 1 Form of entry	11
Loss 1 Form of entry	0
Loss 2 Forms of entry	5
Loss > 2 Forms of entry	1

Forms of entry are calculated on the basis of 30 pupils, a staffing ratio of 1:23 operated for Year 1 in 1989.

Perford School and Community College

Dear Parents and Friends,

We are interested in finding out what influences the view which people have of a School. Your honest help in this research will enable us to plan for the future. Please let us know what you think.

For each possible consideration please circle 5 if you think that it is most important, down to a circle round 1 if you think it unimportant, or 0 if you would not even consider it.

Emphasis on work in class	(5)	4	3	2	1	0
Homework	5	4	3	2	1	0
Library	5	4	(3)	2	1	0
Computer availability	5	(4)	3	2	1	0
Teaching methods	5	(4)	3	2	1	0
Class organisation e.g. setting	5	4	3	(2)	1	0
Tutorial and social education	5	(3)	3	2	1	0
Length of School Day	5	4	3	(3)	1	0
Sporting activities	5	4	(3)	2	1	0
Music and Drama activities	5	4	(3)	2	1	0
House activities	5	4	3	(2)	1	0
Year activities	5	4	3	(2)	1	0
Assemblies	5	4	3	2	(1)	0
Help from subject staff	5	(4)	3	2	1	0
Help from form tutors	(5)	4	3	2	1	0
Help from year heads	5	4	(2)	2	1	0
Help from deputy heads	5	4	3	(3)	1	0
Help from headteacher	5	4	3	(2)	1	0
Examination results	(5)	4	3	2	1	0
Written reports to parents	5	(4)	3	2	1	0
Leaving reports	(5)	4	3	2	1	0
Several foreign languages	5	4	(3)	2	1	0
Latin available	5	4	3	2	1	(0)
Specialist science courses	(5)	4	3	2	1	0
School rules	5	4	(3)	2	1	0
Standards of discipline	(5)	4	3	2	1	0
Rewards e.g. work points	(5)	4	3	2	1	0
School uniform	5	(4)	3	2	1	0
Appearance of pupils	5	(4)	3	2	1	0
Specialist teaching rooms	5	(4)	3	2	1	0
State of buildings	5	4	3	(2)	1	0
Displays of work	5	4	(3)	2	1	0
Employment statistics	5	4	(3)	2	1	0
Pupils to higher education	(5)	4	3	2	1	0
Demeanour of pupils	5	(4)	3	2	1	0
Demeanour of staff	(5)	4	3	2	1	0
Tradition and history	5	4	(3)	2	1	0
Quality of brochures	5	4	3	(2)	1	0
Parents meetings with staff	(5)	4	3	2	1	0
Parents association activities	5	4	(3)	2	1	0
Community activities of the school	5	(4)	3	2	1	0

Please list any other items you think are important. My thanks for your help.

## APPENDIX 2

THE OPEN UNIVERSITY                      -                      THE UNIVERSITY OF KEELE

### Community Perceptions of School Strengths

This questionnaire has been developed after two pilot investigations which suggest those criteria by which most people would judge a school. Objective evidence from each school can then be compared with perceptions and this could inform a strategy for local action. Although basically simple the statistics will be analysed and there will be considerable material available to each school.

The simplicity of design has been maintained to encourage response and schools are urged to seek the following balance in eliciting replies.

30 Parents of Year Seven (they have had to consider the issue)  
30 Leaver students (they will influence opinion later)  
30 Community (they respond to the grapevine)  
10 Staff [Section 1 only] (they are a "control" group)

It would be helpful if participating schools could arrange the community section to include:

5 ancillary staff e.g. cleaners, dinner staff  
5 local retailers, services  
5 "community workers" e.g. police, clergy, doctors  
5 immediate neighbourhood residents  
5 distant neighbourhood residents  
5 old students

Please categorise responses accordingly for maximum analysis.  
If this is too difficult to arrange please note the basis of selection for your community group.

Further interviews with all sections of the school community will be based on both perceptions and sources of information.

The results will be made available to individual schools and will demonstrate the match between perceptions and reality. Note that there is a deliberate policy of avoiding negative judgements but responses to section 3 may include material which will be passed to the school.

Many thanks for your help in some research which it is hoped will be of benefit to the school. It may also be of help in providing evidence to substantiate or negate the view that many choice decisions are based on inadequate evidence - an issue of considerable policy impact.

D.C.Glover



## Perford School and Community College

Dear Parents and Friends,

We are interested in finding out what influences the view which people have of a School. Your honest help in this research will enable us to plan for the future. Please let us know what you think.

For each possible consideration please circle 5 if you think that it is most important, down to a circle round 1 if you think it unimportant, or 0 if you would not even consider it.

Emphasis on work in class	⑤	4	3	2	1	0
Homework	5	4	3	2	1	0
Library	5	4	③	2	1	0
Computer availability	5	④	3	2	1	0
Teaching methods	5	④	3	2	1	0
Class organisation e.g. setting	5	4	3	②	1	0
Tutorial and social education	5	①	3	2	1	0
Length of School Day	5	4	3	③	1	0
Sporting activities	5	4	③	2	1	0
Music and Drama activities	5	4	③	2	1	0
House activities	5	4	3	②	1	0
Year activities	5	4	3	②	1	0
Assemblies	5	4	3	2	①	0
Help from subject staff	5	④	3	2	1	0
Help from form tutors	⑤	4	3	2	1	0
Help from year heads	5	4	②	2	1	0
Help from deputy heads	5	4	3	②	1	0
Help from headteacher	5	4	3	②	1	0
Examination results	⑤	4	3	2	1	0
Written reports to parents	5	④	3	2	1	0
Leaving reports	⑤	4	3	2	1	0
Several foreign languages	5	4	③	2	1	0
Latin available	5	4	3	2	1	①
Specialist science courses	⑤	4	3	2	1	0
School rules	5	4	③	2	1	0
Standards of discipline	⑤	4	3	2	1	0
Rewards e.g. work points	⑤	4	3	2	1	0
School uniform	5	④	3	2	1	0
Appearance of pupils	5	④	3	2	1	0
Specialist teaching rooms	5	④	3	2	1	0
State of buildings	5	4	3	②	1	0
Displays of work	5	4	③	2	1	0
Employment statistics	5	4	③	2	1	0
Pupils to higher education	⑤	4	3	2	1	0
Demeanour of pupils	5	④	3	2	1	0
Demeanour of staff	⑤	4	3	2	1	0
Tradition and history	5	4	③	2	1	0
Quality of brochures	5	4	3	②	1	0
Parents meetings with staff	⑤	4	3	2	1	0
Parents association activities	5	4	③	2	1	0
Community activities of the school	5	④	3	2	1	0

Please list any other items you think are important. Ky thanks for your help.

## THE OPEN UNIVERSITY - THE UNIVERSITY OF KEELE

What we know about our schools

I am sure that you know that parents now have a greater degree of choice of school for their children than in the past. I am involved in some enquiries to find out how parents and the local community think about schools and would appreciate a few minutes of your time to answer a few questions. On the left side of the first part of the page I have given a list of the things people have said affect their thinking about a school. On the right would you please put a tick in the box for those features which you feel are the strengths of your local secondary school.

Your help is very much appreciated. D.C.Glover

Emphasis on work in class

Effective teaching methods *see note below ①*

Specialist rooms and equipment e.g. Science, Library

Help teaching staff give to pupils

Caring atmosphere for pupils

Examination results

Contact with parents through interviews and meetings

Clear and known school rules for pupils

Standards of behaviour and high expectations

Appearance of pupils

Number going to college or university

Reports on pupil progress and achievement *see note below ②*

Now would you answer these questions please by putting a ring round YES or NO for each one

Have any of your <sup>OLDER</sup> children attended the School?  
 Did you attend the School or its predecessors?  
 Have you attended any evening classes at the School  
 Have you talked about the School at work?  
 at social events  
 with neighbours

<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="radio"/> No
<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="radio"/> No
<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No

Please add any comments which you think might be helpful in our work of deciding "what makes a good school".

① Streaming for ability for all levels of ability.



### Format for Semi-structured Interviews

Section 1. Length of time in the area, knowledge of the school, reputation of the school.

Section 2. Strengths of the school, evidence for these, comparison with other schools.

Section 3. Would you choose the school for your child?  
Reasons for and against.

Section 4. Any other comments?